What Jerusalem Means to Us

Muslim Perspectives and Reflections

Edited by
Saliba Sarsar and Carole Monica C. Burnett

Foreword by
His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal
of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

A Publication of
The Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation

Jerusalem's sacredness is intricately connected with its worldliness as it is the home of Palestinians, both Muslim and Christian, and others. However, what has been challenging in recent decades is the lack of empathy and understanding on the part of some who advocate and work for an exclusive, ethnically based control of the city. Such attitudes and actions not only ignore the history, laws, and complexity of the facts on the ground, but also disrupt the very character and future peace of the city as well as discourage the enhancement of Palestinian-Israeli relations.

"Mutual respect and peaceful coexistence are essential prerequisites for a lasting peace. The status quo is simply untenable. Jerusalem is a shared gift, not the sole property of one government or one people."

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal

"Whoever controls Jerusalem, it will remain one of the most historically important cities in the world, particularly for its Muslim inhabitants and Muslims all over the world."

Dr. Hisham Khatib

"Jerusalem will continue to be coveted for its deeply rooted religious and spiritual meanings, for the archaeology and history of this Canaanite Jebusite city, and for its distinct civilizational force and cultural heritage."

Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway

"I was removed from Jerusalem, but Jerusalem will never be removed from me."

Dr. Imam Imad Ad Din Ahmad

"Jerusalem is the city of prophets and the gateway of earth to heaven."

Sheikh Maher Assaf

"Jerusalem will truly be free only when politicians realize that the city belongs to no single religious group while simultaneously belonging to all religious groups."

Mohamed K. Ghumrawi

"Jerusalem, you are a living city with a heart and a soul and an access to the hidden and the unknown."

Dina Naji

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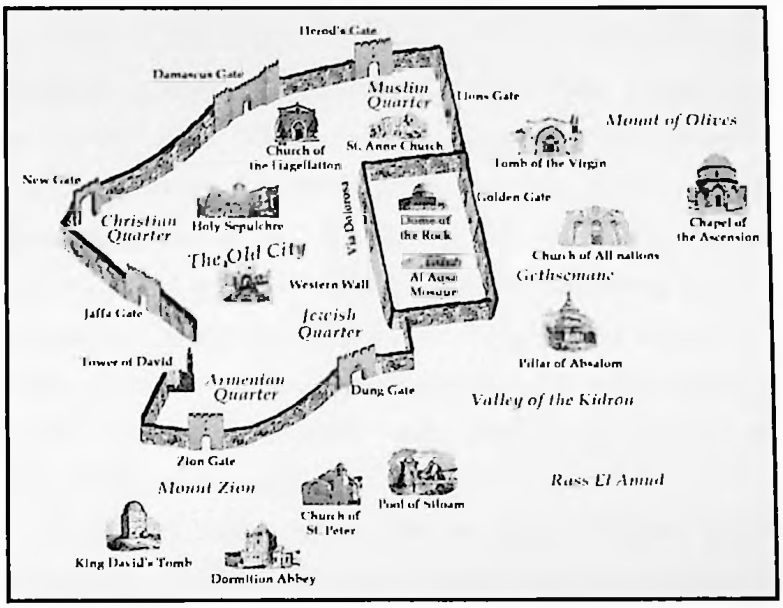

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FOREWORD

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal

Kenneth Cragg's descriptions of "The Excellence of Jerusalem" asks, "What is to be done about Jerusalem?" and, more important, "What is to be thought about Jerusalem?" He concludes, as is appropriate for me, with a Qur'anic reflection that takes us behind Moses and likewise even behind Abraham. Things Mosaic have always been constitutive of things Judaic—the Exodus, Sinai, the covenant and, from all these, "the promised land." The Qur'an, to be sure, records them in its own idiom.

Islam has been interested in going behind Moses to Abraham, to affirm a divine relationship antecedent to Sinai where only Jews were assembled and where all generations of them undertook the covenant they had exclusively with Yahweh. Paul, in the New Testament, notably in his letters to Galatians and Romans, was also interested in Abraham as a party to divine meanings, relevant to Paul's case-making, that were prior to Moses and Mosaic covenanting.

The "excellence" of Jerusalem is to have been, and to remain, one (redoubtable) of such capital cities summoned, as such, to be "the joy of the whole earth."[1]

Jerusalem transcends human conventions and extends beyond space dimensions.

Reaching Divinity prompts us always: to maintain a holistic universal picture, to observe the potential beyond that motivates men to seek better human life conditions. Divinity is about continuous striving toward the ultimate sublime that urges us to excavate the sublime in us (يا أيها الإنسان، إنك كادح إلى ربك كدحا فملاقيه.) (O man! Verily, you are returning toward your Lord with your deeds and actions, a sure returning, meaning, 'verily you are hastening to your Lord and working deeds' and you will meet.) It urges us to realize that infinite forms of life are manifestations of divinity's infinite traits and attributes.

Divinity is not restricted or bounded to a specific place, society, or even religion, but rather encompasses us all. We live in Divinity, rather than it living in us or among us, we think by it rather than thinking of it, we wander and move inside it rather going to it, it is the where-ness of the where, the when-ness of the when. Divinity can be reached anywhere and any when, only by removing our internal obstructions that block us from seeing it or connecting with it. Observe divinity deep inside yourself, it will consequently observe you:

(والذين جاهدوا فينا لنهدينهم سبلنا وإن الله لمع المحسنين.)

---

1 Kenneth Cragg, "The Excellence of Jerusalem," *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies* 2, 1 (1998): 18.

> And those who strive in Our (cause), - We will certainly guide them to our Paths: For verily Allah is with those who do right.

Thus Jerusalem, in its open connectedness to divinity, is a human space not a physical place or mere place on a map. It does not affiliate with any political system, cannot be owned by a specific culture, or exclusively claimed by any religion.

Jerusalem is rather the other way around: we identify ourselves with it instead of giving it a particular identity, we derive meanings from the illuminating godly-human experiences that were formed along its long history, not exclusively by a specific religion, race, or culture, but by consecutive diverse human accomplishments, ordeals, fulfillments, sufferings, setbacks, aspirations, and prosperities.

Jerusalem has always maintained its plural significance in all three religions. Thus, Jerusalem cannot be politicized, because it is not just a piece of land on a map. To identify with Jerusalem, religion followers such as Jews, Christians, and Muslims need to acquire attitude of love and peace, not political power, and must work on preserving its excellence, by keeping its forever plural multifold significance.

It is also a history that is deeply entwined with that of my own family. As Sherif of Mecca and King of the Hijaz, my great-grandfather Hussein presided over the principal routes of pilgrimage; respect for each other's holy spaces was ingrained in the tradition of "hospitality and watering" and sanctuary. This hereditary duty directly links Mecca with the Esplanade

of Jerusalem and those who seek to ignore the connection fail to understand history, tradition, and reality.

Jerusalem is a land of peace and love, that is, land of excellences that cannot be owned, disputed, or unilaterally annexed, and must be forever exempt from vulgarity.

The fact that Jerusalem is the first *qiblah* for Muslims, witnessed Jesus on the "Cross," are irreducible historical factors, and imply that Jerusalem has to have plural Excellences, not unilateral and exclusivist.

Exclusive ownership or political sovereignty over Jerusalem rooted in the cause of God, reminds us of T. S. Eliot saying: "They who serve the greater cause may make the cause serve them."

We are at crossroads:

a. Either we surrender to exclusive possession of Jerusalem that thus denying other faiths, Christianity and Islam, of their historic and holy inheritance in Jerusalem. Thus, entering into an endless struggle and uncontrollable bloodshed.

b. Or we acknowledge that Jerusalem the blessed, is a land of peace and self-denial. A space that confirms its divine nature, in affirmation of its plural significance. A place administered through international consensus, to maintain a peacefully managed environment, and provide unconstrained love and connectedness among humans.

Ultimately, however, to achieve a shared future, we should seek to wage peace through the development of a greater receptivity: "I became myself by what I am given by the other." As humanity we share a sense of deep cultural legacy, and this must be our guiding light if our shared humanity is to survive.

Today, owing to exclusionist policies, the fate of this city with its rich social fabric, a city that means so much to the peoples of the Abrahamic faiths and to the whole world, is at a crossroads.

Mutual respect and peaceful coexistence are essential prerequisites for a lasting peace. The status quo is simply untenable. Jerusalem is a shared gift, not the sole property of one government or one people.

PREFACE

Sir Rateb Y. Rabie, KCHS

Jerusalem is significant in Islam and to Muslims, as it is in the other two monotheistic faith traditions of Judaism and Christianity and to their followers. It is where Prophet Muhammad connected with God, as expressed in the sacred narrative of his Night Journey, and it is the first *qiblah*, the direction toward which Prophet Muhammad and Muslims faced when praying in the early period of Islam. Home of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock, it is the third holiest city in Islam after Mecca and Medina.

What Jerusalem Means to Us: Muslim Perspectives and Reflections consists of twelve important essays that address different aspects of the strong bond that ties Islam and Muslims with Jerusalem. It complements well the successful *What Jerusalem Means to Us: Christian Perspectives and Reflections*, which was published in 2018. A publication of the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF), the book is done in partnership with the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. RIIFS is under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Royal Family. We deeply

appreciate HRH Prince El Hassan's enlightened leadership and voice in support of interfaith and intercultural dialogue as well as his important ideas contained in his Foreword to this book.

The city's sacredness is interconnected with its worldliness as it is the abode of Palestinians, both Muslim and Christian, and others. However, what has been challenging in recent decades is the lack of empathy and understanding on the part of some who advocate for an exclusive, ethnically based control of the city, as evidenced by Israel's policy to Judaize the city and negatively impact the lives and livelihood of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and beyond. The challenge has also come from Israel's supporters in the United States and elsewhere. A prime example is U.S. President Donald J. Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and his moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Such actions not only ignore the history, laws, and complexity of the facts on the ground, but also disrupt the very character and future peace of the city.

Jerusalem is unique and its character is enriched by its inclusivity and universality. It should be shared by the three monotheistic faiths and by Palestinians and Israelis. This view was expressed during the 20th HCEF International Conference, "Together in Faith—Jerusalem: Our Collective Home," on November 3, 2018, Washington, D.C. The conference declaration states,

> Jerusalem is a city like no other. Nestled deep in the heart of three Abrahamic faith traditions, it carries a special weight in our varied, but interrelated beliefs and images of reality.

Although our political goals sometimes intrude into faith issues, it is clear now, more than ever, that Jerusalem's significance resides in embracing humanity and inclusive relations.

- Jerusalem cannot belong exclusively, or even predominantly, to one people or one religion.
- The inhabitants of Jerusalem must have a dignified life and have equal access to housing, jobs, education, medical care, municipal services, political participation, cultural activities, and religious sites.
- Legal protection is essential. All inhabitants of Jerusalem must be equal before the law.
- Christians, Muslims, Jews, and others everywhere should advocate for preserving Jerusalem's Status Quo and for maintaining it as the inclusive center of faith.
- The Question of Jerusalem should be addressed through negotiations, not dictation; through fairness, not partiality. Both the process and its outcome must be just and inclusive.
- Only when Jerusalem is at peace can she fulfill its true universal character and be the center of reconciliation for humanity.

We commit ourselves to bringing together religious leaders, peace organizations, and others of good will in support of Jerusalem, our collective home. We plan to do so in an organized, systematic, and systemic manner.

In addition to highlighting the Muslim dimensions of Jerusalem, *What Jerusalem Means to Us: Muslim Perspectives and Reflections* is a true expression of our commitment to Jerusalem and its inhabitants. We urge people of good will—Muslims and others—to advocate for maintaining it as an inclusive center of faith and for preserving Jerusalem's Status Quo.

In closing, we, at HCEF, extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to the book and faithfully testified to the Muslim stake in Jerusalem. We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Saliba Sarsar and Dr. Carole Monica Burnett for editing this essential book; Mr. Alawneh Mahir for designing the book cover; Mr. Elias Saboura, Esq. of Holy Land Books for his friendship and support; Dr. Renée Hattar, Head of International Studies, Programs, and Projects at the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, for her invaluable assistance; and Mr. Steve France, Esq. for his collaboration and sponsorship of this book.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Saliba Sarsar with Dr. Carole Monica C. Burnett

Jerusalem displays the features of an ordinary urban environment, but is also unique among the cities of the world. Its stunning uniqueness stems from its holiness, as expressed in varying degrees by the actualities and visions of the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Over the millennia, the city assumed importance to the "sacred geography" of these believers, "... mak[ing] it very difficult for them to see the city objectively, because it has become bound up with their conception of themselves and the ultimate reality—sometimes called 'God' or the sacred—that gives our mundane life meaning and value."[2] To put it simply, it is here that venerable patriarchs and prophets as well as generations upon generations of faithful believers have perceived the presence of the divine.

Jews regard Jerusalem as the symbol of religious connectedness. It is the center of their consciousness and "the house of [their] life."[3] Every celebration of *Pesach* (Passover)

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2 Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), xvi.

3 David Rosen, "The Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem in Judaism," http://www.rabbidavidrosen.net/Articles/.

includes the words "Next year in Jerusalem!" Most Christians believe Jerusalem to be the holiest city and the center of their faith: "In Jerusalem, Christianity was born. Every Christian, every Church, was born in Jerusalem. The words of the psalm apply precisely to that spiritual but real birth and belonging: 'Everyone was born there'" (Psalm 87:5).[4] Marking the location of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, it is the source of inspiration for Christian meaning-making and salvation. For Muslims, Jerusalem (*al-Quds* or *Bayt al-Maqdis*) is Islam's third holiest city after Mecca and Medina. It is connected with the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey on *al-Buraq*, his celebrated steed, from Al-Masjid al-Haraam in Mecca to Al-Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem (Al Isra' 17:1) and his ascension to Heaven (*Mi'raj*). In addition to her religious and territorial importance, "[t]he city has strong evocative and emotional associations and has its own place in the hearts of Muslims."[5]

The literature on Jerusalem is extensive, but one is hard pressed to find personal perspectives and reflections on Jerusalem by Palestinian Muslims contained in a single volume. *What Jerusalem Means to Us: Muslim Perspectives and Reflections* fills the void by bringing to light the thinking and or experiences of Palestinian Muslim men and women who are from Jerusalem, who have experienced Jerusalem firsthand, or who have thought about Jerusalem from

4 Michel Sabbah, with Drew Christiansen and Saliba Sarsar, eds. *Faithful Witness: On Reconciliation and Peace in the Holy Land* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009), 102.

5 Ziad Abu-Amr, "The Significance of Jerusalem: A Muslim Perspective," *Palestine-Israel Journal* 2, 2 (1995), http://www.pij.org/details.php?id-646.

afar. They share aspects of the past and present and look forward to a more hopeful future. This book is also a perfect companion volume to *What Jerusalem Means to Us: Christian Perspectives and Reflections* (https://hcef.org/publications/what-jerusalem-means-to-us/), which was published by the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation in 2018.

Jerusalem is a multi-faith, multilingual, and multicultural city. It embodies various layers, colors, shades, and scents. What appeals to us, what we remember, depends largely on who we are and the experiences and events we encounter in connection to the city. Each of the contributors to the book focuses on one or more aspects of Jerusalem's life, especially those important to Islam and Muslims, ranging from the historical, spiritual, and religious to the national, cultural, and personal. The common thread connecting all the contributions is a passionate love for the city, enhanced by faith, justice, and the hope of peace. Some highlights follow.

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi emphasizes the history and politics of Jerusalem. He explains the depth of Jerusalem's past and how the city has changed hands dozens of times. During the twentieth century alone, it witnessed Ottoman, British, Jordanian, and Israeli rule. Since the June 1967 War, Israeli control has been pervasive as Israel creates Jewish dominance in the city and its environs. Today, as in earlier centuries, the city's sacred nature has heightened the complexity of any effort to solve the Jerusalem question, which "is often used or manipulated to reach non-religious goals." Dr. Ali Qleibo presents Jerusalem's contribution to Muslim civilization

by examining the meaning and linkage among Al-Quds, *Al-Mi'raj*, and *Al-Insan Al-Kamil* (the complete man). For Qleibo, Jerusalem's "mere name triggers an emotional affectual upsurge in every Muslim heart and mind. It is where nostalgia, piety, the love of God, and his Prophet Muhammad meet." For Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway, Jerusalem for Muslims has profound religious and spiritual meanings, in addition to its archaeology and history and its civilizational character and cultural heritage. However, even though *convivencia* (coexistence or multi-faith harmony) among Jews, Christians, and Muslims has been the hallmark of Muslim civilization, it "does *not* include sharing holy places, the status of which should remain as on the eve of June 6, 1967. Nor is *convivencia* ever possible under the Israeli occupation." Similarly, Dr. Hisham Khatib holds that the Muslim relationship with Jerusalem is so deep that it is an integral part of their mentality and livelihood. "In spite of the Israeli occupation and its hardships, most of Jerusalem's residents have insisted on remaining in the city. Belonging to the city compensated for a lot of lost income and material belongings." Sheikh Maher Assaf views Jerusalem as "the city of prophets and the gateway of earth to heaven." In addition to being enshrined in the Qur'an, in the Prophet's Sunnah, and in Muslim civilization through various stages of history, the city is at the heart of Palestinian history and life, and the path to peace.

Dr. Imam Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad combines in his essay both personal and religious sentiments. He finds special meaning in Jerusalem through his mother's memories and his faith.

He writes lovingly of his mother and how she, living in the United States, missed her family, her neighbors, and the sights and sounds of the holy city. Conceived in Jerusalem, Imam Ahmad did not set foot in the city until thirty-two years later. He concludes, "I was removed from Jerusalem, but Jerusalem will never be removed from me." Dr. Azzam S. Elayan shows his affection for Jerusalem through his love for his blind father and the special day he, as a child, spent with him in al-Quds. "Everything he and I did, every place we went, the texture and taste of what we ate, the cadence of his words, the rhythm and rhyme of the narrow streets bouncing off the cobbled stones and off the city wall...all still live within me today." It is with this same warmth that he tours the city with his wife and his children Leila and Adam, instilling in them a generational commitment to Jerusalem.

Dr. Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Dr. Ilham Nasser moved as a young couple from the Galilee to study in the holy city in the early 1980s. While they love the city and appreciate the message of Abrahamic unity, they are pained by the divisions that characterize Jerusalem and how leaders of all backgrounds manipulate "the status of Jerusalem to justify certain religious, national, and political ideologies." Nonetheless, Jerusalem remains for them "a symbol of the possibilities for Arab-Jewish conflict and peace." Rana Hajjaj takes us on a journey through a life of displacement and dispossession, which ultimately is the story of most Palestinians. It took her three decades to arrange to see Jerusalem in-person. But, Jerusalem remains "an inaccessible, highly contested...city, with a signature wall,

many checkpoints, and restrictions on movement" to ensure that access is not open to all Palestinians.

Lana Shehadeh provides an Arab American perspective on Jerusalem. While she reminisces about "the beautiful stone walls, the fresh scent of sesame bread, the organic fresh-squeezed orange juice, and the walk to the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque," she realizes that Jerusalem remains challenged by lots of injustice. For her, while Jerusalem is "a place that in certain secular perspectives may be worth nothing, while to others, with deep spiritual conviction and historical consciousness, it is worth everything." In a similar vein, Mohamed K. Ghumrawi reflects on his personal perspective on Jerusalem and how central it is not only to him, but also to young Palestinian Americans and Muslims around the world. Like many of us, he longs "to see the day when Jerusalem returns to its true essence as a city of peace where Muslims, Christians, and Jews can worship freely, live together, and work together under a government that administers the city with equality for all, regardless of background, ethnic make-up, or religion." Last but not least, Dina Naji shares her feelings about Jerusalem. Although she was never physically present there, spiritually, she never left. In Jerusalem, she believes, "we are all one." It is in Jerusalem that "we become human again." She adds, "We remember that we were born the same, and we will die the same. Nobody is superior, no religion or faith is superior. We all have similar fears, similar weaknesses, and similar sins. We all need to be saved. We all need to return to Him, for there is no other refuge but to Him."

In addition to pondering or experiencing facets of the mosaic that is Jerusalem, what is clear in some of the contributions is that Jerusalem's character is enriched by its inclusivity, universality, and dialogue, not by exclusion, parochialism, and discord. The latter has usually resulted from one political or secular power, backed directly or indirectly by one religion, governing Jerusalem. The point is that no one country or religion should hold a monopoly over Jerusalem. Its spirit is and must remain one of faith, resilience, and hope for all humanity. This sentiment was made clear by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan in his remarks to the United Nations,

> [W]e cannot resolve this [Palestinian-Israeli] conflict without working to preserve Jerusalem for all humanity, as a unifying city of peace. As Hashemite Custodian, I am bound by a special duty to safeguard Jerusalem's Islamic and Christian holy sites, but the responsibility for the Holy City falls on us all.[6]

A few weeks later, he added,

> We have not, and will never, waver from defending Jerusalem, its holy sites, its identity, and its history. The Hashemite Custodianship of Jerusalem's Islamic and Christian holy sites is a duty, a commitment, a firm belief,

6 Remarks by His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Plenary Session of the 75th United Nations General Assembly on September 22, 2020, https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/10.0010/20200922/cVOfMr0rKnhR/DEDT3PeyjlsL_en.pdf.

> and a responsibility we have proudly undertaken for more than a hundred years. Jerusalem is the symbol of peace, and we will not accept any attempts to alter its historical and legal status quo, nor attempts of temporal or spatial division of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif.[7]

The Abrahamic faith traditions and humane politics provide guidance and should inspire our actions. As His Royal Highness Prince Hassan bin Talal has stated,

> The fundamental common element about monotheistic religions is faith and confidence in the good, human-loving, compassionate, and merciful God. All of our religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—consider justice and peace as gifts and blessings from God. All of our religions disapprove of religious justification of violence and inhumane actions, none of them approve of violence, terrorism, or ill treatment of human beings.[8]

The views and activities of extremists regarding Jerusalem in Israel, Palestine, and beyond; the State of Israel's rush to

7 His Majesty King Abdullah II's Speech from the Throne at the Inauguration of the 19th Parliament's Non-ordinary Session in Amman on December 10, 2020.

8 "Message of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan during the 15 March side-event on Islam and Christianity," special video message delivered during the Geneva Center's side-event on the theme of "Islam and Christianity, the Great Convergence: Working Jointly towards Equal Citizenship Rights." Geneva Center for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, March 16, 2017, https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/message-his-royal-highness-prince-hassan-bin-talal-hachemite-kingdom-jordan-during-15-march.

Judaize Jerusalem; and the Trump Administration's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, for example, fail to consider fully the sensitive nature of the city's past, present, and future, as well as the aspirations and feelings of all its residents. such an approach is ill advised and does not advance peace. As Michel Sabbah, Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem, has argued,

> To arrive at a position of stable peace, each of its children, Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, should enjoy the same freedom, the same dignity, the same duties and rights. No one should feel like a guest or a stranger in one's own city. No one should be put in the situation of asking for protection from anyone else. For all of us, children of Jerusalem, despite our national and religious differences, our future is to be one family of the Holy Land. Much purification and many rectifications will have to be done in order to reach this state.[9]

As in Judaism and Christianity, Jerusalem is significant in Islam. As for Jews and Christians, Jerusalem finds a cherished home in the heart and lives of Muslims, Palestinian and otherwise. Our responsibility in light of both religious and secular perspectives is to listen to and learn from each other. Through care, compassion, and dialogue, we can cooperate and overcome discord. As the late Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari of Jerusalem, a leading Muslim voice for reconciliation and peace in Israeli-Palestinian relations, said,

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9 Michel Sabbah, op.cit., 105.

> Killing each other will not get us anywhere. War will never solve the problem. The only way we can solve the problem [is] by looking after each other, trying to solve the problem with love, understanding, respect, honesty, and justice.[10]

This book is an effective and enjoyable avenue toward becoming familiar with or enhancing your knowledge of Muslim perspectives and reflections on Jerusalem. May the exploration of these pages bring illumination to minds and hearts. "Let there be light!"

---

10 Marc Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 99-100.

WHAT JERUSALEM MEANS TO US

Muslim Perspectives and Reflections

1.

A Palestinian Perspective on the History of Jerusalem

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi

As the Israel-Palestine conflict enters its eighth decade, international efforts for ending the military occupation or hopes of securing a two-state solution along the 1967 borders have all but disappeared for Palestinians. Notwithstanding the many important issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, such as the right of return and the Gaza blockade, the annexation of East Jerusalem remains at the epicenter. In terms of geography, demography, society, economy, and cultural life, Jerusalem has been the center of Palestine and the major meeting point of important east-west and north-south transportation axes.

The city bears significance to the three monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the Jewish faith, Jerusalem is considered the center of religion and identity, seen as the earthly manifestation of Zion. It is in the City of David where the people of the Promised Land ought to gather, and where the remains of the "Second Temple" are believed to be. For Christians the significance of Jerusalem relates to the ancient concept of the city as a shrine of preeminent holiness. It is the center of the cosmos, where history began, and where it will

end. It is in Jerusalem that the event of the Pentecost happened, as did the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Finally, in Islam, *Al Quds Ash-Sharif* (the Holy, Noble One, Jerusalem) is one of the three holiest places in Islam, equal to Mecca and Medina. It was toward Jerusalem that Muslims directed their prayers (*qibla*), before Mecca. Jerusalem is referred to in the Qur'an as the blessed holy city, home to the two most important mosques: *Ash-Sakhra* (the Rock) and *Al-Aqsa* (Farthest).

Jerusalem's holiness complicates any attempt to solve the Jerusalem question and is often used or manipulated to reach non-religious goals. As such, it is important to recognize the positions that religious leaders hold regarding the Holy City and the *status quo.*

Palestinian church leaders summarize their position on the question of Jerusalem as follows:

- Jerusalem is a holy city for the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- The Temple lost its significance in Christianity after the death of Jesus Christ.

The holy places of each religion are unique to that religion, and no holy place is shared by more than one religion. All religions must respect the religious, legal, and cultural status quo.

- Al Harem-Ash-Sharif has been a holy place for Muslims for 1,400 years, and their access to it constitutes a religious and historical right.
- The responsibility to defend and protect the Islamic and Christian holy sites is a Christian and Islamic human trust.
- Any assault against the Al-Aqsa Mosque or Al-Haram Ash-Sharif in the interests of or for the sake of another religion is illegal and not permissible.
- The various narratives, according to the church, are historical events and not religious.

As for Israel's Jewish leadership, there are three distinct schools of thought related to Jerusalem's holy places, and specifically Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Haram Ash-Sharif, referred to as the Temple Mount.

- Firstly, religious law according to the Chief Rabbinate prevents all Jews from entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque, calling on them to respect the Islamic sacredness of the site. Israel's supreme religious authority maintains this position to this day.
- Secondly, some Jewish leaders argue that the area bears significance for both Muslims and Jews, and therefore the Al-Aqsa/Al-Haram Ash-Sharif compound should be open to all and become a shared place of worship.
- Finally, there are those who believe the "Temple Mount" belongs only to Jews, whom they perceive as the Chosen People, and that the Jewish community ought to take it by force.

Since 1968, Jerusalem has been annexed by Israel as the capital, sparking great controversy and contestation from Palestinians as well as the international community. No country has recognized or accepted Israel's unilateral annexation to this day. Numerous publications document the special treatment of the city over the years, and attest to its historical, political, and religious significance. What follows will provide a concise review of the history of the Holy City going back 5000 years, as well as an overview of its religious significance for the three monotheistic faiths, and the different policies that determine its governance in the contemporary context. It is said that "whoever controls Jerusalem is in a position to dominate all of Palestine." Herein lie the roots of the troubled and different narratives to portray the "history" of the city of Jerusalem.

A HISTORY OF JERUSALEM

Ancient History

Canaanites and Philistines

Over 5000 years ago, after a wave of drought struck the Arabian Peninsula, tribes of Arab Semites called the Canaanites migrated to the territories east of the Mediterranean Sea that make up present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. A subgroup of this tribe, the Jebusites, settled in present-day Palestine and established the city of Jebus, where Jerusalem stands today. They built the first wall around it, one possessing thirty towers and seven gates. Approximately 2000 years later,

the Philistines, who came from Crete, arrived and settled in the land of Canaan. They mixed with the Canaanite and Jebusite tribes, and lived on the Mediterranean coast in the southwestern area that now stretches from the Gaza Strip through Ashdod and Ashkelon. While the Canaanites gave the territories they inhabited a biblical name, "The Land of Canaan," the Philistines named it Philistine, or "Palestine."

Geographically speaking, the land of Philistine was an important strategic geographic location for the surrounding empires because it stretched from Egypt in the southwest, across a corner of the Mediterranean, to Mesopotamia and Asia in the northeast. Over the millennia before the birth of Christ, the empires of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Mongolians, Greeks, and Romans all grew up around the land of the Canaanites and Philistines and came to rule for varying lengths of time. The area's geographical position meant that it served as both a bridge between these regional powers, as well as an arena for the struggles and conflicts between them. As a consequence, the Canaanites could never establish a strong and unified state, and their political organizations took the shape of independent cities possessing governments bound together by federative relationships. Among the most prominent coastal cities were Bairtuyus (present-day Beirut), Sidon, Tyre, Acre, Ashkelon, and Gaza. The Canaanite cities in the interior included Jericho, Shikim (present-day Nablus), and Jebus (Jerusalem). The religion of these earliest civilizations of Palestine was centered on nature: the sky was the Father God, and earth was the Mother God. It is from these Semitic people that the majority of today's Palestinians descend.

Abraham

In around the 18th century BC, Abraham came from the city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia (Iraq) to the Land of Canaan. He settled somewhere in the Jordan Valley. As the Old and New Testaments had not been revealed when he was alive, Abraham's religion was neither Jewish nor Christian, but he was simply a believer in the oneness of God. He was described in Genesis as worshipping "the most high God." The Holy Qur'an mentions that he was a "Muslim," not in the modern definition of one who follows the laws revealed in the Qur'an, but rather in the sense of having given his "submission to the will of God." Thus Christians, Muslims, and Jews still pray for him in their prayers, as they believe God has enjoined them to do. Abraham's concubine, the Egyptian Hagar, bore his son Ismail, to whom present-day Arabs now trace their descent; meanwhile his wife, Sarah, bore his son Isaac, to whom present-day Jews trace their lineage. The question is debated of which son—Ismail or Isaac—was to be presented for the sacrifice. Abraham moved to a place near Hebron (al-Khalil), where he lived, preaching monotheism. When he died, his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, buried him in the same cave in which his wife Sarah was buried (the Tomb of the Patriarchs).

Around the year 1400 BC, the twelve sons of Jacob (Isaac's son) left Haran for Egypt. They integrated with the Egyptians, multiplied, and gained strength for several hundred years, becoming known as the "Israelites." It was in Egypt that Moses, the founder and lawgiver of the Jewish nation, yet a

prophet to all three revealed religions, was born and trained in Egyptian philosophy, becoming learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Moses, along with his people, left Egypt around the thirteenth century BC. He wandered for forty years in the Sinai, and during this time he received the Divine Law at Mount Sinai (Tur). After the death of Moses, Joshua assumed leadership and led his people to the west across the Jordan River, into Canaan. He conquered Jericho, which he destroyed along with its inhabitants. Joshua then took control of Yashuu' (Bayt Ele), Likhish, and Hebron; however, the Philistines blocked his advance toward the coast in the area between Gaza and Jaffa, and the Canaanites kept him from occupying Jerusalem. When they arrived in Canaan, the Israelites were influenced by the Canaanites and adopted their religious rituals, especially the presentation of sacrificial offerings to the God Baal.

For the next 150 years, the newcomers "shared" with the Philistines and Canaanites portions of the area of modern Palestine. And the Jebusites continued living and controlling Jerusalem. But no one group was able to consolidate control over the whole territory. There were numerous conflicts, struggles, and battles between these groups, during which each maintained its own "culture" and separate entity.

Around 1000 BC, King David was able to subjugate the petty states of Edom, Moab, and Ammon. For seven years, he held Hebron as his capital, but then moved the center of his rule to Jerusalem for the last thirty-three years of his reign. After him, rule passed on to his son Solomon. According to Jewish narrative, he built a place of worship known as "Solomon's

Temple." This temple became the center of religious life and the primary symbol for Jews. After Solomon's death, his kingdom was split into two sections: the Kingdom of Israel in the north, made up of ten tribes, with Samaria (Sabastia) as its capital, and the Kingdom of Judea in the south, made up of two tribes, with Jerusalem as its capital. The following decades were characterized by chronic battles between the two, and against the Canaanites/Philistines.

Babylonian, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Empires

Around 720 BC, the Assyrians under King Sargon destroyed the Israelite kingdom in the north. In 600 BC, the Babylonians, under the command of King Nebuchadnezzar II, conquered the southern kingdom, destroying "Solomon's Temple" in approximately 586 BC. In both instances, most of the population was led away in captivity to Assyria and Babylon in Mesopotamia. As for Jerusalem, it became a Babylonian colony. Around 538 BC, Cyrus, King of Persia, was able to conquer the Babylonian Empire (Mesopotamia). He moved on in his conquests until he occupied Syria and then Palestine, including Jerusalem. He permitted Nebuchadnezzar's captives to return to Palestine, and a "Second Temple" was completed in 515 BC.

As the Greek Empire flourished after the reign of Alexander the Great, Palestine fell under the rule of the Ptolemies of Egypt (322–200 BC), and then under the rule of the Seleucids of Syria from 200 to 142 BC. In this year, the Maccabees

(Jews) revolted against the rule of King Antiochus IV, who had damaged "the Second Temple" and forced the inhabitants to renounce Judaism and embrace Greek paganism.

Around 63 BC, after the Romans had overcome the Seleucids in Syria, the Roman general Pompey gained control over Jerusalem. With the help of the Romans, Herod became King of Judea in the year 40 BC. His rule lasted until his death in 4 BC. During his time, the "Second Temple" in Jerusalem was refurbished and expanded, and, following the birth of Jesus Christ and his crucifixion, came the call to propagate the Christian faith.

In the age of Titus, around 70 AD, the Romans reoccupied the city of Jerusalem after a Jewish insurrection. Under Hadrian several decades later, the final remnants of the Jewish inhabitants were subjugated and driven out of Palestine. The Romans erected a new city on the ruins of Jerusalem, which they named Aelia Capitolina with reference to the emperor Aelius Hadrianus. Around 395 AD, Jerusalem became a Byzantine and Christian city. But although Palestine and its inhabitants became a part of the Byzantine Empire politically and religiously, the life and culture of the local Canaanites remained focused on Jerusalem.

After a brief period of control by Persia in the early seventh century AD, Palestine and the rest of Syria emerged from the rule of the Byzantines and entered the sphere of the Arab-Islamic Empire.

Arab-Islamic Empire

Jerusalem was the first direction toward which the Muslims prayed *(qibla)*, "the first of the two *qiblas*," and Palestine "the precincts God has blessed." It is important to note that for the approximately 1400 years from the coming of the Arab-Muslim civilization to Syria, including Palestine, through to the current century, Jerusalem remained Arab, from the standpoint of cultural heritage, language, and demographics.

In 638 AD, the second Arab Muslim Caliph, Omar Ibn al-Khattab, arrived in Jerusalem. According to Arab-Muslim accounts, the freedom of religious worship for *Ahl al-Kitab* (the People of the Book) in Jerusalem is God-given and thus cannot be contested by any governor. In that spirit, the perception was not that the city had been taken by force but rather that the Caliph had initiated "the Covenant of Omar," an agreement that established Arab-Muslim political governance over the city but recognized the inalienable right to freedom of religion for all inhabitants of Jerusalem: Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Omar entrusted to two Arab Muslim families in Jerusalem (Nuseibeh and Judeh) the keys of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He did so in order to establish the equal rights of all inhabitants and to affirm that the church is a holy place, not to be damaged, disrespected, or violated in any way; he also intended this action as a solution to the bickering between various Christian sects over who should control the church.

Arab and non-Arab-Muslim rule prevailed over Jerusalem and Palestine from the seventh century AD until the beginning of the twentieth century, with the exception of the period of the

Crusades. The Crusaders captured the city in 1099 AD, saw it liberated by the Ayyubids under Saladin in 1187 AD, and then recaptured it in 1229 AD. Some fifteen years later, the Arab-Muslims again established their rule. In 1516, the Ottoman Empire began ruling Jerusalem and much of the Middle East, and the city did not fall from their hands until the British military occupation during World War I, specifically in 1917.

The Islamic dynasties—the Umayyads, the Abbasids, the Fatimids, the Seljuks, the Ayyubids, the Mamelukes, the Ottomans, and the Hashemites—respected the religious and historical "status quo" of the holy places established in the Covenant of Omar Ibn al-Khattab. They all shared in the reconstruction of Jerusalem, preserving the sanctity of its heritage and developing its Islamic and Arab legacy. These dynasties strove to reconstruct Al-Aqsa Mosque, referred to in the first verse of Surah 17 of the Qur'an. Finally, Arab-Muslim rulers were eager to give Jerusalem a special status; the first Umayyad Caliph Muaawiyah linked his own personal identity with Jerusalem, calling himself the Caliph of Bait al-Maqdis (Holy House). The Caliph Abd al-Malik erected, in 691, the magnificent Dome of the Rock Mosque (Masjed *Qubbat al-Sakhra*). The popular belief is that Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven (*Al-Isra' wal Mi'raj*—the glorious night journey and miracle of ascension) from that area. He also rebuilt the Mosque of Al-Aqsa in the southern part of the area of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, to take the place of the wooden building of the old Omar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque of 638 AD. These two mosques were restored and embellished by subsequent Arab-Muslim rulers.

Modern History

Arab National Movement: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

At the end of the eighteenth century, the increase of European interests in the Near East and the corresponding decline of the Ottoman Empire led to the Capitulations System, in which European powers were able to gain privileges and footholds in the Middle East in return for bribes and favors to the Ottoman rulers. Through the protection and guidance of foreign consulates (British, French, Austrian, and Russian), a number of Jewish activists and institutions (for example, Moses Montefiore, the Rothschild family, and Alliance Française) were able to establish a "Jewish quarter" outside the walls of Jerusalem. This quarter later on became the core of the Jewish society in the city. It included the Montefiore Quarter, established in 1859 to the west of Jaffa Gate; Mishkanot Shaananim, established in 1860 in front of Jaffa Gate; and Nahlat Shivva, also founded in 1860, on the road to Jaffa. Between the years 1875 and 1878, Mea She'arim and Ivan Israel were established. By 1882, the Jewish community (Yishuv) in Palestine lived in four urban areas, namely Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias, and Safed, and it constituted six percent of the population of Palestine. It was contained within six colonies whose total area was 62,500 *dunums* (one *dunum* is equal to 1000 square meters or just under a quarter acre).

The populations were composed primarily of Russian and Romanian immigrants who came after the oppressive events of 1881-82 in Russia.

Continuing to work under foreign guidance and protection, and inspired by European commercial and investment projects, Theodor Herzl, in his booklet *The Jewish State* (1896), called for a political movement similar to European colonial-settler movements. Herzl wanted the Zionist movement to be a new model for colonial-settler movements, and he described it as being "a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia," an outpost of "civilization" opposed to "barbarism." He described his plan and the means that he wanted to employ for colonizing Palestine with these words:

> Let "sovereignty" be given to us on a piece of land... and we will take care of what follows... The plan is simple in its form, although complicated in its execution... Two organizations will be in control of executing the plan: The Jewish Society and the Jewish Company.

In his diary, Herzl recorded the need to expropriate land in Palestine and to "spirit" the population across the borders. He also added: "If we one day capture Jerusalem, and I am still alive and capable of doing anything, then I will destroy everything not sacred to the Jews in it."

But such plans to set up an exclusively "Jewish state" in Arab Palestine and to control Jerusalem essentially failed, even after the end of World War I, when British colonial

offices sponsored the Zionist colonial-settler movement. Indeed, during the first phase of Zionist activity, between the years 1878 and 1918, the area of land over which Zionist-Jews gained control in Palestine amounted to 2.48 percent of the total country. By 1918, the number of Jews in Palestine did not exceed 55,000, while Palestinian inhabitants numbered 700,000; that is, eight percent of the population was Jewish and 92 percent was Palestinian.

Pre-Nakba: World War I and the British Mandate

With the end of World War I, the British had contracted three mutually contradictory promises for the future of Palestine:

- The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence of 1915, in which the British invited the Arabs to become their allies against the Ottomans and offered in return to help achieve their national aspiration of establishing their independent Arab states, including Palestine.

- The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which outlined a new colonial map for the Middle East drawn in a joint effort by the French and the British. Controversially, the Agreement went against the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, paving the way for much of the imagined Arab states to be under French and British control.

- The Balfour Declaration of November 1917, in which Britain declared its support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in historical Palestine.

These were the first steps that led to the gradual violations of equal rights for Arabs, including Palestinians, over the territory. After that, Jerusalem became the focal point of a now century-old Palestinian national struggle, in which Palestinians have made every effort to fend off British and Zionist invasion and colonization of the city.

In 1917, after British General Edmund Allenby's troops occupied Jerusalem, he summoned William McLean, a civil engineer for the city of Alexandria, to draft the first plan for infrastructure for the city of Jerusalem. McLean accomplished his task in 1918, and his plan became the basis for all of the others that followed in years to come. The plan divided Jerusalem into four areas: the Old City and its walls; the areas surrounding the Old City; East Jerusalem; and West Jerusalem. It prohibited building in the areas surrounding the Old City and placed restrictions on building in East Jerusalem. Meanwhile, West Jerusalem was declared an area open to development. Given the fact that this western part of the city was inhabited by the Jewish minority, McLean's plan helped to strengthen and develop the western area of the city at the expense of the other three.

It is important to note here that there were some international efforts to resist the Zionist expansion in Palestine, albeit unsuccessful. In 1919, the King-Crane Commission—the first

international fact-finding committee ever sent to the Middle East—advised against the creation of a Zionist Jewish entity in Palestine and recommended instead that a "wholly independent Syria [including Lebanon and Palestine] should be established, on the principle of the right of self-determination." However, Britain ignored these recommendations. In 1922, Britain was designated by the League of Nations as the mandatory power for Palestine, and the Palestine Mandate became effective on September 29, 1923.

The second paragraph of the preamble to the British Mandate for Palestine incorporated the Balfour Declaration, and the World Zionist Organization was given the responsibility to advise and cooperate with the British administration in the economic, social, and general development of the country. Many Zionist colonial organizations moved to Jerusalem, such as the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemeth Yisrael) and the World Zionist Organization. Meanwhile, an armed force (Haganah) was formed in March 1920.

The British government was keen on constricting the Palestinian presence in favor of expanding Jewish presence in Jerusalem at four different levels. On the one hand, it used structural and urban planning processes to change the demographic composition and the traditional central status of the Old City with the aim of disengagement. In July 1926, the British government passed an appropriation law, which "granted the British government the power to seize any lands for purposes of Jewish settlement." On May 30, 1928, it passed the law on reconciliation of rights and land ownership,

and imposed property tax in urban centers in the same year. Initially, the government set the tax rate at 12 percent of the value of the rent but lowered it later to 9 percent following objections by the residents. However, the government went back and raised the tax to 15 percent in April 1932. It also issued a decree stipulating respect for freedom of worship for all followers of the three monotheistic religions, and upholding the status quo in Jerusalem.

However, in spite of these intensive joint British-Zionist efforts in Palestine, the percentage of Jews in Palestine did not exceed 11 percent of the total population, according to the first British census in December 31, 1922; it did not exceed 17 percent, according to the second British census on December 31, 1931. In 1922, the land the Jews controlled did not exceed 2.48 percent of Palestine; by 1936 they controlled no more than six percent of Palestine.

The 1930s were characterized by a number of Palestinian uprisings, including strikes and revolts against the British occupation, its mandatory policies, and the mass Zionist immigration. Naturally, Jerusalem was the epicenter of such demonstrations.

In February 1939, the St James Palace Conference, held in London, sought to plan the future governance of Palestine after the end of the British Mandate. Separate meetings were held between the British and the Arab and the Jewish delegations. This resulted in the publication of the 1939 White Papers, which put restrictions on Jewish immigration and land sale and promised an independent Palestine within 10 years.

In May 1942, the Zionists declared in a meeting held at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City that the Balfour Declaration implied the creation of an independent Jewish state, and they called for its establishment. Meanwhile, the British government began to reevaluate its strategy in Palestine and the Arab world, fearing that the pro-Zionist policies would ultimately prove detrimental to British regional interests. It was then, in 1947, that the idea of a partition plan that would separate Arabs and Jews was introduced to contain the conflict.

Between Nakba and Naksa: Israeli Colonialism and Occupation

The UN Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte first suggested in his partition plan that "Jerusalem be part of the Arab State, the establishment of a municipality for the Jewish community, and special measures for protection of Holy sites." After the initial plan was rejected by the concerned parties, he then presented a revised version of the plan in which he proposed the establishment of two independent states with "special and separate treatment for Jerusalem," which he suggested should be "placed under UN effective control with maximum local autonomy for Arabs and Jews and full guarantees to protect Holy sites and places with freedom of access thereto and freedom of worship." In September 1949, Count Bernadotte was assassinated by a Zionist terrorist organization in Jerusalem.

However, this UN partition plan of 1947 and the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) plan of 1950 were never implemented. On the one hand, the Palestinians refused the 1947 plan because they deemed it to be prejudiced in favor of the Zionist interest. On the other, the Israelis saw the Arab rejection of the plan as an opportunity to further their plans for occupying and colonizing Jerusalem and Palestine. Ben-Gurion revealed this aspect of Zionism by saying:

> The question of Jerusalem is not a question of arrangements, or politics, it is first and foremost a question of military capabilities: will we have the military power for (a) occupying the Old City; (b) occupying a wide corridor from here (Tel Aviv) to Jerusalem, not just for passing through but for forming a settled strip that binds Jerusalem to the rest of the territories of the Jewish state; and (c) destroying the Arab Legion in the triangular area. Without this, it cannot be said that Jerusalem has been "liberated."

On May 14, 1948, with the departure of British forces from Palestine, the State of Israel was declared and accompanied by an escalation of operations to evict the Palestinians forcibly from their homes and their properties. This was the beginning of the Palestinian Nakba.

April 9, 1948, for example, Menachem Begin's Irgun Zvai Leumi terrorist gang massacred 250 Palestinians of the village of Deir Yassin, situated on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem;

most of the slain were old men, women, and children. And on October 28, 1948, Moshe Dayan's 89th Battalion massacred 580 Palestinians of Dawaymeh, a village on the road between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Begin considered the massacre of Deir Yassin so crucial to Zionists that he asserted, "There would have been no Israel without [what he called] the victory at Deir Yassin." In July 1948, the Israeli Army attempted to occupy all of Jerusalem, but they failed due to the resistance of Arab forces. In September 1948, as Minister of Defense, Ben-Gurion suggested the undertaking of a military operation to occupy Latrun in order to insure a "Jewish Jerusalem."

Following the cease-fire agreement on November 30, 1948, Israeli forces controlled the western part of the city in addition to the Mt. Scopus area (*Jabal Al Musharraf* area in Arabic), while Jordanian Arab forces controlled the eastern part of the city, including the Old City. The armistice agreement of 1949 between Israel and the Arab states declared that "the armistice lines are not to be construed in any sense as a political or territorial boundary."

However, Israel continued its expansion efforts past the proposed borders of the 1947 UN partition plan and past the 1949 armistice line, to gain control over 77 percent of Palestinian lands. In Jerusalem, Israel seized 84.23 percent of the municipal surface area, leaving 11.48 percent in the hands of the Palestinians. The remaining 4.39 percent became a "no man's land" under the supervision of the UN.

This Zionist expansion led to the annexation of Palestinian neighborhoods and mass evictions of citizens as well as the

creation of new Jewish neighborhoods. For example, Israel surrounded Arab quarters in West Jerusalem including Abu Tur, Baqah, the German Colony, and Katamon, and changed their names to Hebrew: Abu Tur became Giv'at Hananya; Baqah became Ge'ulem; the German Colony became Rafa'im; and Katamon became Gonim. New Jewish quarters were also established among and behind the aforementioned Arab quarters: Talpiot, New Baqah, New Katamon, Rasqo Quarter, and Giv'at Mordechai.

To prepare the way for seizing Palestinian properties and liquidating them in occupied Jerusalem of 1948, Israel passed a series of administrative and legislative laws. Examples are the Emergency Regulations regarding "abandoned" properties, Supplement B No. 10 of June 23, 1948; the Emergency Regulations concerning the cultivation of wastelands and the use of water resources (1948); the Emergency Regulations (Security Zones) of 1949; and the Absentees Property Law of 1950. These "laws" allowed Israelis to confiscate both movable and immovable Palestinian property.

The case for internationalization of Jerusalem gained momentum in December 1948 through the UN General Assembly's Resolution 194 (3). However, at a field "engagement and disengagement" post, Abdallah Al Tal (the Jordanian military governor) and Moshe Dayan (the Israeli military governor) agreed during one meeting to the drawing of a "field division map of the city," attaching to it the cease-fire agreement and later the Rhodes Agreement of April 1949.

This map governed the actual "dividing" of the city into "West & East" Jerusalem for 19 years, until the June 1967 war.

The part of Jerusalem where the Green Line was located ran 7km in length. There was a joint administrative "crossing point" known as Mandelbaum Gate, used primarily for the movement of diplomats and staff at the UN Truce Supervision Organization who observed the implementation of the cease-fire agreement. It was also used by journalists and Christian pilgrims who visited the city on Christmas and Easter. There was also an arrangement for the crossing of an Israeli mission on a bi-weekly basis to the Hadassah area and the Hebrew University on Mt. Scopus! Despite these military and legal arrangements for "sharing and dividing the city," and throughout nineteen years, no request was filed nor was any desire expressed officially, civically, or religiously to the Jordanian or the international side to visit or pray at Al Buraq wall. The Arab side maintained custody over Jewish properties (namely 20 percent of Al Magharbeh neighborhood) under the "Custodian of Absentee Properties"!

On December 9, 1949, the UN General Assembly issued Resolution 303, which reaffirmed the UN's commitment to internationalize Jerusalem and to consider it a "Corpus Separatum." The Knesset (the Israeli parliament) started convening its sessions in the western part of the city, and in December 1950, the Knesset passed a law according to which Jerusalem was declared the capital of the state of Israel. On April 24, 1950, the Jordanian parliament "unified" officially the West Bank with Transjordan in the Kingdom of Jordan. This

was a "practical measure" that the Arab League considered on June 12, 1950, as "temporary and practical measures" on the basis that Jordan was safeguarding a Palestinian "trust" pending future settlement. In 1952, the Jordanian government expanded the Arab municipal area in East Jerusalem (it was 2.2 km^2 at the time) to include villages and neighborhoods, increasing its total area to become 6km^2. In the following year, on July 27, 1953, King Hussein declared that Jerusalem was "the second capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan" and that it constitutes an "integral and inseparable" part of Jordan. In January 1960, in his speech before the Jordanian parliament, King Hussein repeated his statement that Jerusalem was "the second capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan."

With the establishment of the PLO and the National Council and the endorsement of the National Charter on May 28, 1964, Jerusalem was reaffirmed as the capital of the Palestinian people. Later, PLO Chairman Ahmad al-Shuqairi sent a telegram to U Thant, the UN Secretary General at the time, informing him that the "first Palestinian national conference was convened in Jerusalem on May 28, 1968, that the Palestinian people from all over the world were represented at the conference, and that it has decided to establish the Palestinian Liberation Organization to assume the powers of the sole and legitimate representative on all matters related to the Palestinian people."

The first Palestinian declaration of independence in 1948 stated that "Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine." This was further reaffirmed in the Declaration of Independence in

Algeria on November 15, 1988, announcing the "establishment of the state of Palestine with its capital Al-Quds al-Sharif.

In short, the city of Jerusalem was split, both militarily and culturally, between the Jewish west and the Arab east until the June 1967 War.

Post-Naksa: Israelization of Jerusalem

After the June 1967 War, Israel rushed to execute its second stage of occupying and Judaizing the rest of Jerusalem and all of Palestine. This process moved along with astonishing speed, and in all fields: military, administrative, legislative, demographic, geographic, religious, and historical-archaeological. Its ultimate goal was the complete uprooting and destruction of Palestine.

Successive Israeli governments considered areas behind the "Green Line" as military-occupied territories and did not incorporate them within its political or civil systems but rather exercised military occupation, administration, and power over them and applied military laws, regulations, and orders to them.

However, this military situation excluded that part of Jerusalem that is considered part of the occupied West Bank and under the sovereignty of the state of Jordan, which the Israeli government had annexed illegally and unilaterally. The motive behind these new borders was the desire to control main "defense areas," communication routes, and valleys in accordance with the decision "not to accept the absorption of larger than necessary numbers of Arab residents in the area

that was annexed, allocating open areas for the development of Jewish neighborhoods [settlements]."

As a result of the re-demarcation process following 1967, the Neve Yaacov neighborhood was annexed, which had been under Jordanian sovereignty since 1948. Israel also annexed the airport area at Qalandia.

Following that, and in complete disregard for international opinion and the blatant violations of international laws that prohibit acquisition of lands of others by force, Israel imposed and applied its laws, its judicial jurisdiction, and its administration there. The new municipal borders seized an additional area of 64 square kilometers from the West Bank lands, namely twenty-eight Palestinian villages and parts of Ramallah, Al Bireh, and Bethlehem municipal areas. Together with the (Arab) municipal area of six km^2, the new municipal borders of Jerusalem extended over an area of $70km^2$.

The expansion that was approved by the Israeli government on July 26, 1967, and two days later by the Knesset, placed all of the geography of Jerusalem (east and west) and its municipal areas that extended over an area of 108 km^2 under occupation. The percentage of Jewish population was 74.2 percent compared to 25.8 percent of Palestinians. The Green Line today is not referred to as constituting political borders but is rather being referred to as the "seam line."

On June 28, 1967, the Knesset amended the 1950 law and acted illegally to expand the scope of Israel's "sovereignty" over the eastern part of the city. Israel started constructing settlements in areas annexed to East Jerusalem, in violation of

Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulates: "The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own population into the territories it occupies."

The first of forced eviction measures came with the forcible displacement of 650 Palestinians from Al Magharbeh neighborhood in the Old City and the destruction of their houses (at least 135 houses) for purposes of building an esplanade in front of Al Buraq Wall (Western Wall). Israel then built the first new Jewish settlements in 1968 (Ramat Ashkol and Hagiva' Hatzarfatit, the French Hill).

By 1985, ten major "urban" settlements were constructed on confiscated lands of occupied East Jerusalem, in complete disregard for UN General Assembly Resolution number 2253 (on July 4, 1967), which called upon Israel to "cancel all measures taken and to immediately cease any measures that might change the status quo in Jerusalem." In the first three years of the military occupation of the city, Israel confiscated 25,870 dunums of Palestinian lands in Jerusalem.

In addition to the confiscation of lands and displacement of residents, Israel established a "regime of systematic discrimination" and oppression against Palestinians in the city in all aspects of their daily lives (for example in terms of allocating municipal resources—Palestinian neighborhoods receive only 12-13 percent of the municipality's budget despite the fact that Palestinians constitute at least 37 percent of the residents). Other examples include the confiscation of lands, deprivation of Palestinians from their right to build in the city, revocation of Palestinians' residency right (at least 14,595

identity cards of Palestinian residents have been revoked since 1967), and the demolition of their houses. Since 2004, Israel has demolished 746 Palestinian residential units in the city, 61 of which were demolished in 2017.

In the eighties of last century, the (Israeli) Jerusalem Municipality initiated the development of plans delineating the borders of Palestinian neighborhoods in the city, classifying large areas thereof as "green areas" and "areas outside urban planning" where urban expansion is prohibited. The plans allocated less than 15 percent of East Jerusalem lands (approximately 8.5 percent of the municipal scope of Jerusalem) to meet the residential needs of Palestinian residents who constitute 40 percent of the total residents in the city.

Israeli official measures for the "annexation" of Jerusalem took place thirteen years after the 1967 war when the Knesset issued a decision on July 30, 1980 recognizing the municipal borders according to the illegal expansion that took place. It declared the whole area as an integral part of the state of Israel, considering Jerusalem as "the complete and united capital" in its basic law.

This act constitutes a flagrant violation of the international law and was condemned by UN Security Council's resolution number 478 (issued on August 20, 1980) stating that "all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying power, which have altered or purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and in particular the recent "basic law" on Jerusalem, are null and void and must be rescinded."

Israel re-delineated the municipal borders twice to deepen its control over the Palestinian population growth: in 1985 the city was expanding to the west by a total area of 0.5 km^2 and in 1993 it expanded by 17.9 km^2 increasing the area of municipal Jerusalem to 126.4 km^2.

From a demographic perspective, Israel was not able to achieve all of its objectives in terms of forcing Palestinians to leave Jerusalem. In fact, the result of these policies was quite the opposite, as the number of Palestinian residents in the city increased at least five times more since 1967 with a growth rate of 2.7 percent between 2010 and 2015 compared to a growth rate of 1.5 percent of the Jewish residents in the city.

Despite Israeli policies and measures to colonize and de-Palestinize Jerusalem since 1948, 360,000 Palestinians still live in Jerusalem, with Palestinian institutions and organizations serving all aspects of their lives. The Palestinians, six and a half million of them, resist the Israeli occupation, reject its "laws" and "policies," and hold fast to their rights. They consider Jerusalem an inseparable part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and a fundamental component of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It should not be dropped from or ignored in any political agenda on Palestine.

The area that Israel has illegally annexed from East Jerusalem is now home and shelter for at least 324,000 Palestinians and around 204,000 Israeli settlers, around 3000 of whom live in the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods (particularly in Silwan, Ras Al Amoud, Mount of Olives, Sheikh Jarrah, and in the

Muslim and Christian quarters of the Old City), rendering the lives of Palestinian residents unbearable.

The Israeli structural plan for Jerusalem confirms the policy of "Israelization," under which settlements expand while the housing and development needs of Palestinian residents are undermined. The majority of settlement expansion and the establishment of "Bantustans" are completely unrelated to the "historic Jewish narrative" but rather seek to tighten Israel's full control over the city. The same applies to the major settlement blocs in Maale Adomim, Gush Atzion, and Giv'at Ze'ev, which—and many people do not realize this—are actually located outside the municipal borders within the areas of the occupied West Bank.

The daily hardships of Palestinians are further exacerbated by Israeli military checkpoints that isolate Jerusalem from its Palestinian environment in the West Bank, imposing on Palestinians from outside Jerusalem a bureaucratic permit system to enter the city. Additionally, Israel started the construction of the "Apartheid" Wall in 2002, with construction works continuing despite the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion issued by a majority vote in July 2004 and submitted to the United Nations General Assembly regarding the construction of the "Wall." The Advisory Opinion states that East Jerusalem remains an occupied land, and the majority of the ICJ panel of judges concluded that the route of the "Wall," "underlines the illegal measures taken by Israel regarding Jerusalem and the settlements, which were condemned by the UN Security Council." As such, the Court

concluded, the Wall violates international law and therefore should be dismantled and compensations paid to those affected by it.

Finally, the Israeli plan known as "The Project of Greater Jerusalem" seeks to guarantee Jewish control through expanding the "district" borders of Jerusalem by annexing three major settlement blocs to the city as "sub-municipalities," namely: Gush Atzion, Maale Adomim (E-1), and Giv'at Ze'ev. These settlement blocs were all built on occupied West Bank lands. These measures can now, especially following President Trump's declaration, add around 150,000 Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank as residents of the city, while excluding an equivalent number of Palestinian residents living in neighborhoods located outside the "Wall" (Shu'fat refugee camp, Anata, and Kufr Aqab).

Politics of Jerusalem

Jerusalem has always been seen as the cultural, economic, and political center of Palestine, and a symbolic city for the Arab world. It represents Palestinian nationality, identity, and resistance. Palestinians have always rejected any proposal denying their right to Jerusalem. After the Balfour Declaration in 1917, Jerusalem became the stage for the national struggle of the Palestinian people. From the early days of the British Occupation in 1921, protests included strikes, riots, and revolts (1922, 1932, 1933, 1936, and 1939) against British practices and Zionist immigration. After the 1967 war, Palestinians

continued to reject Israel's self-claimed sovereignty over the city, by refusing to join the West Jerusalem municipality and maintaining efforts to preserve the Arab character of the eastern part of the city. The dynamics of Palestinian resistance against Israeli policies and practices in East Jerusalem, including Israeli efforts to judaize its nature, have been continuous ever since. In 1988, the Palestinian National Council declared the Independent Palestinian State and proclaimed Arab Jerusalem its capital. Since Jerusalem lies in the north-south crescent of the West Bank, the integrity of the Occupied Territories cannot be maintained without Jerusalem as the geographic and demographic center.

Today, an important aspect of Palestine's resistance against the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem has to do with the Al-Aqsa/ Al-Haram Ash-Sharif compound. Weekly peaceful protests have been taking place at the mosque every Friday during morning prayers, in response to the escalating number of *status quo* violations undertaken by the Israelis. Since January 2020, when the White House released its so-called "Deal of the Century," the Islamic Waqf has called on Palestinians and on the international community to defend the status quo of the holy sites, to respect its Jordanian custodianship, and to reject any and all attempts by Israel to take control of the compound.

Israeli Policy Toward Jerusalem

The historical justification on which Israel builds its claim to the land of Palestine and Jerusalem goes back to the Jewish

exodus 4,000 years ago, when Jews came from Egypt to Palestine and settled there for some time.

After the end of the British mandate and the war of 1948, Israel controlled the western part of the city while Jordan had sovereignty over the eastern part, including the Old City. After declaring its independence on May 14, Israel began seizing Arab-owned land in the western part of the city, even though the area had been designated as part of the "Corpus Separatum" by the United Nations. It also transferred its governmental departments from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, with the move of the Knesset in 1950.

When, in the course of 1967 War, Israel occupied Arab East Jerusalem and subsequently announced the "unification" of the city, a modern myth was born; in fact, Israel has tried ever since to turn Jerusalem into a Jewish city forcibly through illegal annexation and the application of law and jurisdiction over the entire city, yet depriving the eastern part of certain services and leaving it to become a marginalized area.

In 1980, the Knesset passed the so-called Basic Law or Jerusalem Law to legislate Jerusalem as "indivisible" and as the "eternal capital city of Israel." Until today, Israel has attempted to secure its sovereignty with numerical superiority, by increasing the number of settlements and transferring the Jewish population to Arab neighborhoods. One particularly sensitive subject is the confiscation of Palestinian-owned land on the pretext that it ought to become part of Israel's national parks.

In addition, Israel's control and limitation of the access of Palestinians living in the West Bank to the capital are increasingly strict, while access is facilitated for Jewish pilgrims

and citizens of Israel. To enforce movement restrictions, Israel established a permit system in 2003. Israel also has the power to revoke residency status for Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, and exerts control over family reunification procedures.

International Law Concerning Jerusalem

Under international law, which prohibits the annexation of territory by force, East Jerusalem is considered occupied territory, and Israel's annexation of the city has no legal standing. Its activities in both parts of the city, such as settlement building and land confiscation, are hence null and void.

Several internationally recognized legal documents help solidify this claim. The UN Charter (1945) recognizes the right of all nations to self-determination, in addition to stating that territorial gains from war are unlawful, even if achieved in the course of self-defense. This is especially relevant in the case of Israel and Palestine, with regard both to land occupied in the West Bank through illegal settlements and to illegally-annexed Jerusalem.

The UN has always recognized the special status of Jerusalem and the illegitimacy of its occupation. It considers East Jerusalem as occupied territory and has repeatedly declared Israel's activities in this part of the city as illegal. Numerous resolutions on the question of Palestine reaffirm the reality that Jerusalem is under belligerent occupation, and

so the claims made by Israel that Jerusalem is the undivided capital of the Jewish State are null and void. This remains true even after the United States moved their embassy to the Holy City. Until today, the basic international juridical status as envisaged in Resolution 181 for Jerusalem remains legally valid since no other resolution has been passed to annul or to supersede it. In addition, Resolution 242, which was passed by the Security Council, reaffirms adherence to the UN charter and calls for the "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict," which include East Jerusalem.

Finally, the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), relative to the protection of civilian persons in a time of war, is intended to cover the conduct of foreign occupation of a given territory during a conflict, and therefore applies to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Its applicability has been recognized by the UN General Assembly and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

American Policy Toward Israel and Palestine in the Context of the "Deal of the Century"

U.S. President Donald J. Trump's *Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People* was released on January 28, 2020, after more than two years of development. The plan is the result of a joint effort with Israel, but no Palestinians were consulted throughout the drafting of this so-called "Deal of the Century." The plan includes

political and economic measures that would give the illusion of a two-state reality, but actually formalizes Israel's settler-colonial agenda in the West Bank. It foresees the complete annexation of the Jordan River Valley, names Jerusalem the undivided capital city of the Jewish State, and prevents the State of Palestine from having any control over borders, military capacity, or air space. The plan would undoubtedly exacerbate resource scarcity for Palestinians, as Israel would maintain control of the water-rich and fertile land.

Unsurprisingly, the plan was immediately rejected by the Palestinian people and their representatives, namely the PLO, who has refused to resume diplomatic relations with the United States since Trump announced the move of the US embassy to Jerusalem in 2017. A significant number of civil society organizations, EU states, international NGOs, activists, journalists, and other individuals have condemned the US proposal and any efforts to further the implementation of an apartheid system in Palestine at the expense of its civilians. Since its publication, tensions have risen in the West Bank and in the Gaza strip, with clashes between Palestinians and the IDF escalating and the number of civilian casualties rising.

2.

Al-Quds, Al Mi'raj, and Al-Insan Al-Kamil
Jerusalem's Contribution to Muslim Civilization

Dr. Ali Qleibo

Al-Insan al-Kamil, the complete man, is a complex theological problematic that belies the Sufi spiritual struggle to achieve gnosis and gain insight into humanity's nature as divine. The Sufi concept describes one who has reached perfection, literally "the complete human being." The epithet contrasts the spiritual purity of the primordial human being with the material human who is bound by his or her senses and driven by earthly desires and needs. The iconic images of both prophets—Adam before the fall and our father Abraham, Khalil Allah, the friend of God—are exemplary and are forerunners of the Muslim concept of man without sin. The appellation is an honorific title to describe the Prophet Muhammad who is considered *al-insan al-kamil* par excellence. The Sufi discourse of gnosis and *al-insan al-kamil* provides insight into humanity's real nature as divine. The mirror metaphor, favored by the Arab Andalusian Sufi philosopher Shaikh-e-Akbar Mohi-ud-Din Ibn-e-Arabi (1165-1240) describes the dialectic relation

between God and man in terms of subject and object. Humanity at large is a refraction of God's light. In Fusus al-Hikam, Ibn Arabi writes,

> Man unites in himself both the form of God and the form of the universe. He alone manifests the Divine Essence together with all his Names and Attributes. He is the mirror by which God is revealed to Himself, and therefore, the final cause of creation. We ourselves are the attributes by which we describe God. Our existence is merely an objectification of his existence. While God is necessary to us in order that we may exist, we are necessary to Him, in order that He may be manifested to Himself.

Al-insan al-kamil, a title describing the transcendent status of Prophet Muhammad, finds its full expression in the Night Journey (Al-mi'raj), whence Prophet Muhammad connected with God in Jerusalem. That night, according to the Qur'an, God blessed the rock and its environs. Blessed and sanctified by God (الذي باركنا حوله), the rock assumed a new identity as the "Holy Rock" (الصخرة المقدسة). Roman Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina, assumed its new Muslim identity as the Home of the Holy Rock, *Bait al-Maqdis*, from which the present-day appellation Al-Quds, The Holy, is derived. In the following centuries, special discourses were deployed, namely, the virtues of Jerusalem, folk literature, miniatures representing the Night Journey, and the architectural masterpieces in Jerusalem. These oeuvres further confirmed the privileged elevated status of the

holy city that witnessed the eruption of the sacred: hierophany, a word much favoured by Mircea Eliade.

Bait al-Maqdis is constitutive of Muslim faith. Al-Quds, the blessed rock, stands as the axis mundi and a point of connection between heaven and earth.Even though Al-Hajj, the pilgrimage, to Mecca is interpreted as a duty prescribed in the Qur'an, the spiritual and theological role of Jerusalem as a major center of pilgrimage (*ziyarat*) in Islam is paramount. In Muslim narratives, Jerusalem stands out as the first direction of prayers in the formative years of Islam, the focal point of the miraculous Night Journey and one of the three pilgrimage mosques.The Prophet enjoined Muslims to go on pilgrimage, that is, travel with the declared intention to pray, to three mosques: Mecca, Medina, and Al-Quds The relationship of the three holy cities, it must be stressed, is not of a hierarchical order but of a dialectic nature based on their value as symbolic expressions of the sacred in Islam.

The concept of the sacred (القداسة) in Islam is expressed paradigmatically along the lines deployed within a cultural, intellectual, and symbolic context. The complex symbolic paradigms through which the three sacred cities discursively deploy their theologies and traditions include the authoritative symbolism of the Qur'an and Sunnah, Muslim orthodoxy as defined by the Prophet's actions and sayings, and the consensual interpretations of tradition. Culturally deployed legends and tales add a mystic aspect to the miraculous event and underlie the mystical allure of Jerusalem that stamps its tangible and intangible heritage throughout history.

In Al-Aqsa Mosque, legend, myth, and ritual meet. It is sacred, it is historic, and it is magical. The sacrosanct space exudes an overwhelming sense of spiritual serenity and transcendence, which is timeless and sublime. To the Holy Rock, Al-Quds, the Muslims first prostrated themselves in prayer. Henceforth, Al-Aqsa Mosque came to be known as the first *qibla*, direction of prayer, and the third noble sanctuary in Islam. Pilgrims visit *Beit al-Maqdis* to experience the physical manifestations of their faith, confirm their beliefs in the holy context with collective excitation, and connect personally to Islam through its symbolic sacred expressions specific to the place of hierophany in *Layletal-Isra' wal-Mi'raj*.

Pilgrimage to the Noble Sanctuary is a transcendent experience. The pilgrim's first view of the Dome of the Rock is visionary. The beauty of the Noble Sanctuary is astonishing. The architecture evokes the exhilarating feelings of awe, delight, and admiration. Its emotive splendor assuages existential loneliness and stimulates intimations of the infinite. Its immensity, lyricism, and harmony trigger the feeling of the sublime. *Subhan Allah* (Glory be to God) comes involuntarily to mind.

The Cotton Market, the covered Mamluk bazaar, provides the most spectacular entrance to Al-Aqsa Mosque. The long, dark tunnel leads to a staircase in deep shadow. As one stands on the dark landing, the gold of the Dome glistens in the bright sunlight. Climbing the dark steps, one is overwhelmed by the glow outside. Slowly the eyes adjust to the light, shining above one's head. Through the small, open entrance in the giant, leaf-

green, painted gate, the deep-green pine tree, the silver-green palm tree, and the blue ceramics that cover the walls of the Dome of the Rock commingle in a sacred symphony of blue, green, turquoise, ochre, and gold.

The simple design and intricate arabesque decoration of the Dome of the Rock is a joy to the eye. But the artistic greatness diminishes compared to the feeling of being in the place where the Prophet Muhammad, may his name be blessed, led all the Biblical prophets in prayer before his mi'raj during that pivotal evening *Lailet al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj*—The Night Journey.

This is when the doctrines of Islam, related to prayers, are believed to have been revealed; hence the oft-quoted Qur'anic verse, "Blessed be He who transported His slave by night from Al-Haram Mosque to Al-Aqsa Mosque whose environs we blessed" (Qur'an, surat l-isra, 17:1).

Standing on the threshold of the Cotton Merchant's Gate, which provides the most striking aspect of the glittering Dome, the faithful are overwhelmed with a vast sense of wonder and delight by the intensity of the moment.

An overpowering sense of sacred presence permeates the precincts and commingles with the architectural beauty of the Noble Sanctuary, the Umayyad architectural masterpiece, to endow the encounter with a transcendent quality. Abbasid, Mamluk, and Ottoman theological colleges, grandiose gateways, water reservoirs, Ottoman reclusive domed rooms, arches, prayer platforms, domed niches, vaulted galleries scatter asymmetrically in the lower and upper courtyards of the mosque. Above, in the center of the upper courtyard,

shimmers the Golden Dome that enshrines the Holy Rock (*al-Quds*), the locus of Prophet Muhammad's spiritual ascent in the Night Journey (*al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj*). The architectural narrative traces the fourteen centuries of Islam in Jerusalem. In their totality, the buildings form a virtual archive of a long train of kings, emirs, and princes, religious personalities who immortalized their names by association with the Holy Rock enshrined under the Golden Dome of the Noble Sanctuary and throughout the thoroughfares, lanes, and alleys leading to Masjid al-Aqsa.

During the month of Rajab in the year 620AD, almost one-and-a-half years before Prophet Muhammad's *Hijra* (migration) from Mecca to Medina, the symbolic event of *Isra* and *Mi'raj* (Night Journey and Ascension) occurred. The Prophet Muhammad made a night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and thence ascended to the heavens. Whereas the horizontal voyage to Jerusalem is referred to as *Al-Isra'*, the vertical ascension to heaven is called *Al-Mi'raj*.

Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing (Qur'an, surat l-isra, 17:1-21).

Throughout the history of Islam, a special genre of literature has been deployed to extol the virtues of the three holy cities of Islam: Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. Authors of great renown, theologians, pilgrims, travellers, and bards had *de rigueur* to include in their repertoire a narrative about the magic

and wonders that bespeak the holiness of these three cities. *The Discourse on the "Virtues of Jerusalem"* (فضائل القدس) is quite distinctive and goes back to the first decades of Islam. Wonderful legends and mythological events find their place in the literature and provide moral and religious education for the plebeians. In one such narrative in relation to the Night Journey, we read,

Then he [Gabriel] brought the Buraq, handsome-faced and bridled, a tall, white beast. bigger than the donkey but smaller than the mule. He could place his hooves at the farthest boundary of his gaze. He had long ears. Whenever he faced a mountain his hind legs would extend, and whenever he went downhill his front legs would extend. He had two wings on his thighs that lent strength to his legs. He bucked when Mohammed came to mount him. The angel Gabriel put his hand on his mane and said, 'Are you not ashamed, O Buraq? By Allah no one has ridden you in all creation more dear to Allah than he is.' Hearing this he was so ashamed that he sweated until he became soaked, and he stood still so that the Prophet mounted him.

During the *Mi'raj*, the Prophet is believed to have received from Allah the command of five daily prayers (*salah*) that all Muslims must perform. Upon his return to Mecca, the Prophet instituted these prayers. It is significant to note that he made Jerusalem the direction (*al-Qiblah*) to which Muslims must face when they pray. Jerusalem is thus called *Ula al-Qiblatain* (the First *Qiblah*).The Prophet and the early community of Islam worshiped toward the direction of Jerusalem during their

stay in Mecca. For almost seventeen months after the *Hijra* (migration), Muslims in Medina also continued to pray facing Jerusalem. Later, God commanded the Prophet to change the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca (Qur'an, surat 2:142-150).

The literature, folk legends, and miniatures inspired by *Al-Isra* and *Al-Mi'raj* are full of miraculous events, marvellous encounters, and symbols. The Archangel Gabriel provided the Prophet with the mythical animal al-Buraq who flew him from Mecca to Jerusalem. There it is believed that the Prophet stood at the Sacred Rock (*Al-Sakhrah al-Musharrafah*) and then ascended to the heavens whence instructions were revealed about the number of prayers the Muslim community should observe each day. In al-Masjid al-Aqsa, the Prophet of Islam met with the Biblical prophets and he led them in prayers. After these experiences, the Prophet flew back to Mecca astride the mysterious *Buraq*.

Al-Mi'raj, as a symbolic expression of the sacred, remains shrouded in evocative mystery around which folk culture deployed fantastic narratives. According to folk legend, the Holy Rock, whence the Prophet rose on his "quick visit" to the heavens, as witness to the miraculous eruption of the sacred, has changed and has come to assume a symbolic function as a sign of that mysterious Night Journey. In folk culture, it is believed that the rock bears the imprint of the Prophet's feet. "Stand still," the Prophet was told, and he stamped his feet firmly on the rock to keep it in its place. It is commonly believed that the rock started to rise along with him to the

heavens to meet God, and it would have continued had it not been for his firm command to stay put. The trace of his feet is now enshrined in the southwestern reliquary that also contains hairs from his beard. In another narrative, my Sufi friend, Al-Sheik al-Jamal, explained, "Prophets do not leave traces in the sand, but the stamp of their footprints shows up on rocks."

Legend portrays Buraq as a magical animal, bigger than a donkey and smaller than a mule, with lightning speed—hence the name, *al-Buraq*, an anagram of the word *barq*, Arabic for "lightning," to denote the element of high speed with which the Prophet travelled between Mecca and Jerusalem. *Al-Mi'raj* is derived from the word *arj* (عرج), to drop by for a brief visit, and refers to Prophet Mohammed's rise to the upper skies to seal, in a sense, God's covenant with the Muslim Prophet as *al-insan al kamil* and a paragon to emulate for mankind.

Whether al-Mi'raj describes the ascent of Prophet Muhammad in body or whether it is a spiritual event remains controversial. Muslim theologians, mystics, and poets have proffered *Al-Mi'raj* in terms that eschew the reification and anthropomorphization of God and avoid the pitfalls of the transfiguration of the Prophet into a divinity, whose humanity of which orthodox Sunni Muslims cannot lose sight. Ibn-e-Arabi, basing his argument on the Hadith (saying of the Prophet) "I was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay" advances the view of the "Muhammadan reality" (الحقيقة المحمدية). For Ibn-e-Arabi, the Prophet's divinity is constitutively constituted in the description of Al-Nur al Muhamadi (Muhammadan light). In the emanation scheme

of cosmology characteristic of Sufi and Shi'i metaphysics, the description refers to the pre-cosmic soul of Muhammad, which is associated with the complete human (*al-insan al-kamil)* and Muhammadan truth (*haqiqah muhammadiyyah*). Through the theory of he light as emanating from the Prophet, a concept based on Ibn-e-Arabi's mirror metaphor, the chasm that separates mankind from God in orthodox Sunni theology is thus traversed in Sufism. The primordial purity of Humanity, as a mirror reflection of God, through gnosis, the love of God, Prophet Mohammed, rigorous self-discipline (جهادالنفس) and gnosis can be regained through Sufi asceticism. Whereas the special privileged status of the Prophet as *al-insan al-kamil becomes* the paragon for men to love and to emulate, Jerusalem, *Bait al-Maqdis*, however, as the locus of al-Miraj, is the holy city par excellence. Both the Prophet Muhammad and the Al-Quds were selected and assigned this noble privilege; that of mediation between heaven and earth, as *axis mundi.*

The sacred in Jerusalem exuded an overwhelming sense of spiritual serenity and transcendence that made it the favoured exile city for deposed Mamluk princes. Their ornate mausoleums were enshrined in theological colleges that flourished in the medieval period. Throughout the past millennia, Muslims came on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and stayed here in the precincts of *Al-Haram al-Sherif.* It is believed that the famous Persian philosopher and theologian Al-Ghazali took up residence in the small theological college on top of the Golden Gate where he started his major opus, *Reviving the Sciences of Religion* (احیاء علوم الدین).

Jerusalem is a treasure trove of architectural monuments. Ummayad, Abbasid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman architectural heritage pervades Al-Quds al-Sharif, namely Al-Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary), both the lower and upper courtyards, and all the access streets and alleys that lead to the gates of Al-Aqsa Mosque with its sublime noble serenity and inalienable Muslim Arab identity. Wealthy dowagers, emirs, and sultans are among the illustrious pious philanthropists who bequeathed Jerusalem its majestic edifices and grandiose façades. These include Sitt Tanshiq, Tankiz, Qalawoon, Qaytbay, Barquq, Barka Khan, Baybars, and Arghun El-Kamilly, Baybars, and others. A motley array of personages that included slave traders, palace tutors, royal princesses from East and Central Asia—all seeking a safe haven distant from Mongol invasion, penitent sisters from Mardin, Sufi friends in personal quest for inner peace, and deposed princes sought redemption in Al-Quds al-Sharif. Each endowment has its story of love and hate, loyalty and treachery, fear and faith. Behind these exquisitely designed picturesque façades they sought inner peace. The palatial portals were doorways to personal redemption and paradise; the sumptuously decorated first-floor windows with iron grid bars were windows of grace. Their splendor, the constant Qur'anic recitation, and their sheer glorious disposition compelled the passerby to stop and read *al-bismallah*, the first chapter of the Qur'an (usually recited for the dead).

In Jerusalem, Mamluks found redemption. In a society where every slave could become a Sultan and where every

female slave could become a wife of the Sultan, life was rife with strife. Many chose to spend their last days in peace in Jerusalem where Muslims believe Judgment Day will take place. A plethora of mausoleums dot the main access roads to Al-Haram al-Sharif encased within the innumerable Sufi educational, spiritual, and lodging institutions that are sumptuously decorated façades and palatial portals. In time, the penitent mystics developed into holy men of God, *Awliya'*. Their mausoleums became holy shrines. Up to the nineteenth century, the passerby would stop and listen to the Qur'an being recited by the Sheikh inside, recite the *bismillah* (the first verses of the Qur'an), and move on.

These architectural gems confirm the elevated religious status of the city in Muslim theology and practice. The Mamluk massive building campaign was first and foremost an act of religious tribute to the third-most-holy city in Islam. Among other complex factors, these theological links underlie the Mamluk endeavor to revive Jerusalem as a Muslim religious center of pilgrimage, comparable in importance to that of Mecca and Medina. Hence, the numerous magnificent endowments, include *ribat* (hospices), *zawiyat* (Islamic religious schools or monasteries), *madaress*, mausoleums, caravanserai, *hammamat* (public baths), and palaces. These monuments exemplify and illustrate various overall structural *cum* decorative details and styles such as *ablaq* masonry, interlocked stones, stalactite formations in vaults (*muqarnas*), shell or conch motifs and patterns, calligraphic and ornate inscriptions, and arabesque.

There is, however, one essential point to bear in mind: namely, that *al-Mi'raj* serves as an expression of every Muslim's deep devotion and spiritual connection to Allah, Prophet Muhammad, and Jerusalem, and as a confirmation of Mecca's spiritual and symbolic link with al-Quds.

A victim to a turbulent history whose vicissitudes have made it inaccessible to Muslims first during the Crusader Latin Kingdom and now because of the Israeli occupation, its mere name, Al-Quds, triggers an emotional affectual upsurge in every Muslim heart and mind. It is where nostalgia, piety, the love of God, and his Prophet Muhammad meet.

3.

The Meaning of Jerusalem for Muslims

Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway

Islam came to confirm the *original* previous revelations. Despite serious theological differences, not least because of post-revelational constructs, *convivencia* among the followers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam has been the hallmark of the Islamic civilization, from Cordoba to Jerusalem, and beyond. In fact, Jews were only able to return to living in Jerusalem during Islamic rule, for they were prohibited from doing so previously for many centuries. Yet, *convivencia* does *not* include sharing holy places, the status of which should remain as on the eve of June 6, 1967. Nor is *convivencia* ever possible under the Israeli occupation.

A city that is the desired destination for people from all corners of the globe speaks many languages, and I understand some of them. I am a Jerusalemite who understands many verbal and non-verbal signifiers that grow naturally and artificially on Jerusalem's skin. Arabic is still the predominant language of the Old City of Jerusalem, because Palestinians are still the majority of the inhabitants, despite the ethnic cleansing and utter destruction of the Moroccan Quarter in

1967 by bulldozing an 800-year-old neighborhood. Arabic, the language of the Holy Qur'an and the language of the Arab-Islamic civilization, is still the *lingua franca* of the region, from Iraq to Morocco. Yet, Arabic has been demoted at the hands of the Knesset (Israel's parliament) in the Nation-State Law of 2018, an act that reflects racism and cultural insecurity.

Jerusalem's mosaic is not monolithic. Early in the morning, I could be entering the Old City through Lions' Gate on my way to Al-Aqsa Mosque, while Catholic nuns and priests leave through the same gate to the nearby Gethsemane and Church of All Nations. The Mosque of 'Umar and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the heart of the Old City have been neighbors for centuries. And the Pact of 'Umar with Patriarch Sophronius, more than fourteen centuries old, reflects better times, when religious institutions were protected against infringement. Our collective history speaks volumes of deep historical roots in the Holy City. We are not a twentieth-century phenomenon.

For Muslims, Al-Aqsa Mosque continues to shape their relationship with the city. Decades of going to Al-Aqsa Mosque left many beautiful memories. Years ago, all three generations of our family went there together during Ramadan. It is only a walking distance to the family home on the slopes of Mount of Olives, facing the Old City. It also faces the Muslim cemetery of Bab Al-Rahmah, where at least two companions of the Prophet are buried, Shaddad ibn Aws and Ubada ibn al-Samit. Generations of my family, including my parents and my parents-in-law were laid to rest in the shadow of the eastern wall of the Old City. The Israeli occupation authorities

confiscated this cemetery, which has been in use for fourteen centuries. We are still allowed to bury our dead there, but not in all of it! The southernmost tip of the cemetery, for example, became off limit for Muslim burials, and is believed to be slated for the cable car project, which led *The New York Times* architecture critic Michael Kimmelman to accuse Israel of carrying out the "*Disneyfication*" of *Jerusalem. Tourism at the expense of the sacred!*

There is a process of altering the pre-Nakba Islamic religious topography! Many mosques were transformed into mundane use or rather sacrilegious purposes. One of them, in West Jerusalem, a walking distance from Damascus Gate, remains intact in a good condition, but it has been closed since 1948. The same applies to some Muslim cemeteries within the Green Line! Well, until "development" takes place. The Mamilla (Ma'man-illah) Cemetery is only a couple of minutes' walking distance to the west from Jaffa Gate or New Gate. Its story reflects total disregard for the living and no respect for the dead. The Israeli Jerusalem municipality granted building permits to Rabbi Marvin Hier, from the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, to build a massive Jewish Museum of Tolerance on part of this Muslim cemetery. Israeli newspapers reported that 400 boxes of human remains were exhumed and taken away! The Israeli court system would not stop this evil! This "Museum" will forever be tainted. It is nothing but a monument to Rabbi Hier. It is indeed a place where "*tolerance*" is buried!

A radical colonial project will attempt to change demography in favor of the occupier, the physical topography to reconstruct reality, but most importantly the narrative of and about the indigenous. It appropriates history. Colonialism is by definition exclusivist, self-centered, and *cannot* share. Its hallmark is extra rights for the supra-human colonialist and fewer rights for a dehumanized native, who is allowed to serve and subsist. One of the best representations of dehumanization is the plate number given to Palestinian taxis in East Jerusalem after the occupation in 1967; all of them, at the time, began with 666, the symbol for the biblical beast or Satan!

The map of the Old City fails to reflect the inclusive reality on the ground that predates the Zionist project. It falsely creates the sense that there are four well-defined quarters: Muslim, Christian, Armenian, and Jewish. To deconstruct this predominant tourist map, I will provide examples from the Muslim Quarter first. Enter through Lions' Gate, and you will find Al-Aqsa Mosque to your left, and St. Anne's Church, the birth place of Mary, to your right, then the `Umariyyah school to your left and the Church of Flagellation to your right, then the Naqshbandi Sufi Zawiyah to your left and Ecce Homo to your right, then an Armenian Building/Third Station of the Cross to your left and the Austrian Hospice to your right! In the Christian Quarter, mosques and churches rub shoulders, as well as Christian and Muslim families living together, as a testimony to centuries-old *convivencia.* The Muslim and Christian Quarters are more inclusive than what meets the eye on the tourist map.

Then, there are the colors of the Old City that reflect religious commitment and assert political will. Thanks are due to the late Hashemite Monarch, HM King Hussein bin Talal, who financed the gilding of the Dome of the Rock at Al-Aqsa Mosque/Haram al-Sharif. It dominated the cityscape for centuries, and it continues to define Jerusalem aesthetically! Surah Ya-Sin (36) is inscribed on its blueish octagonal walls on the outside. Higher, adorning its drum outside like a necklace, Surah Al-Isra' (Night Journey) (17:1) celebrates Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey:

> Glory be to [Allah] Who did take His Servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque [*Al-Masjid Al-Haram*] to the Farthest Mosque [*Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*] whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One who hears and sees [all things].

The same Surah proceeds to speak about Prophet Moses and the Children of Israel, with verses that could be understood as speaking about the future of Al-Aqsa Mosque, with ramifications for all. History is still unfolding!

On the golden-turquoise arches inside, facing the Mount of Olives to the east, the verses that speak about Mary and Jesus Christ are flanked by palm trees, commemorating the scene of Jesus' miraculous birth in the Qur'an. Prophets Muhammad, Jesus, and Moses are all mentioned here.

On one level, the Dome of the Rock is peacefully quiet. Yet, there is an ongoing festival of colorful mosaics, Qur'anic

verses, and supplications and motifs that connect the seen with the unseen, the physical with the metaphysical. This mesmerizing unique architectural marvel is reserved for the Muslim ladies when large crowds of Muslim worshippers are anticipated during religious festivities.

The dome that "reflects the will of Heavens," to borrow from the Palestinian poet Tamim al-Barghouti's *In Jerusalem*, should have been kept highest. This statement is only intended as a direct critique of the ever-changing, lifeless, new horizon of Jerusalem, surrounding the Old City. These high-rise buildings should not have been permitted. Much like Washington, DC, where buildings cannot be higher than Capitol Hill, Jerusalem should have been spared the ugliness of buildings that are alien to the spirit of this holy city. The new buildings, to apply the logic of Christian Norberg-Schulz, betray the *Genius Loci*.

The municipal borders of Jerusalem also defy the spirit of the place. Geopolitical maps should not be conflated with holiness and blessedness, two concepts that are predominantly alien to modern political thinking and city planning. Jerusalem's theological dimensions extend beyond its municipal borders, which has been expanded by the Israeli occupation to accommodate its colonial project. It would be absurd to think that holiness could be stopped by the twelve-meter concrete Apartheid Separation *Wall*!

The story of the "Night Journey" in particular speaks of an expanse of divine blessedness that *surrounds* Al-Aqsa Mosque, setting Jerusalem at the center of a blessed and holy land. No geopolitical borders are suggested!

There are those who parade the idea that Jerusalem is not important to Muslims because it has never been the capital of any Islamic state. The answer to such an ill-informed claim is that Makkah (Mecca) was *never* the capital of any Islamic state!

The importance of Jerusalem to Muslims is further reflected in many Prophetic traditions.

> Maimuna said: "O Messenger of Allah! Inform us about Bayt Al-Maqdis!"
> He said: "It is the land where people will be gathered and resurrected [on the Day of Judgment]. Go (grammatically imperative!) and pray in it, for a prayer in it is the equivalent of a thousand prayers in other [mosques]."
> I said: "What if I couldn't reach it?"
> He said: "Then you send a gift of oil to it in order to be lit in its lanterns, for the one who does so is the same like the one who has been there."

How could Palestinian Muslims fulfill their spiritual obligations toward Al-Aqsa Mosque when they do not enjoy freedom of movement? Muslims from the United States, for example, who live thousands of miles away, could have free access to Al-Aqsa Mosque, but Palestinian Muslims from Bethany, which is located couple of miles away, do not!

While the Israeli Foreign Ministry under Avigdor Lieberman attempted to redefine Al-Aqsa Mosque, the definition of Al-Aqsa Mosque predates the emergence of Zionism. Mujir Al-

Din Al-Hanbali (d. 1522) used "Al-Masjid Al-Sharif Al-Aqsa" in the first page of his introduction to *Al-Uns Al-Jalil fi Tarikh Al-Quds wal-Khalil*, which he wrote in the year 900 AH/1494. Muslim scholars understood that the name "Al-Aqsa Mosque" predates the structures, is a name of the space, and that no one building could be called as such. It is anachronistic to call the southernmost building Al-Aqsa Mosque; Al-Hanbali called it "Al-Jami` Al-Kabir Al-Qibliyy" (The Grand Southern Friday-Mosque). It is quite remarkable that Mujir Al-Din Al-Hanbali, the author of the book, offered the following definition:

> Verily, "Al-Aqsa" is a name for the whole mosque which is surrounded by the wall, the length and width of which are mentioned here, for the building that exists in the southern part of the Mosque, and the other ones such as the Dome of the Rock and the corridors and other [buildings] are novel (*muhdatha*).

The paragraph that preceded the definition of Al-Aqsa Mosque was dedicated to its measurement. Twice, the measurements of the Mosque were taken under the supervision of Al-Hanbali to make sure that they were accurate. He mentioned that the length of the Mosque was measured from the southern wall to the northern corridor near Bab Al-Asbat (Lions' Gate), and the width was measured from the wall overlooking the cemetery of Bab Al-Rahmah (Golden Gate) to the western corridor, beneath the Tankaziyyah School, which was confiscated by the Israeli occupation.

To clarify the definition of Al-Aqsa Mosque, it is a name for all the 144 dunums (about 36 acres) including the walls on all four sides, all gates including Bab Al-Rahmah (Golden Gate) and ramps leading to them, including the one leading to the Moroccan Gate, buildings such as the Qibli and the Dome of the Rock, and open courts, all space within, below (that is, subterranean space, such as Al-Marwani), and above (that is, airspace).

Al-Aqsa Mosque belongs to the Muslim Ummah, the global Muslim community at large. It will be under Palestinian sovereignty after the end of the Israeli Occupation. HM King of Jordan will continue to be the Custodian of the Muslim and Christian Holy Places in Jerusalem, with the Directorate of Waqf in Jerusalem continuing to be part of the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Sites. The cornerstone of this Hashemite legacy goes back to 1924 when the Supreme Muslim Council in Palestine recognized the Sharif of Mecca Al-Hussein bin Ali as custodian of the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque. Almost a century later, the Hashemite Custodianship became entrenched in the March 1, 2013 treaty between Jordan and Palestine.

It should be noted that the Qur'anic reference to Al-Aqsa Mosque, appeared years before the actual arrival of Muslims to Jerusalem. It means that it is an integral part of Islamic theology, faith, and creed that Al-Aqsa Mosque was designated as a mosque by God.

Moreover, the importance of Al-Aqsa Mosque in the life of Muslims is reflected in the many other traditions of the Prophet.

One of these traditions—narrated by Al-Bukhari (#1115) and Muslim (#2475)—makes it clear that *traveling* in order to visit mosques for religious purposes, is permitted to three mosques only: Al-Masjid Al-Haram (in Mecca), Al-Masjid Al-Nabawi (in Medina), and Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem).

The language of the above-mentioned Hadith in Arabic gives the impression that it is prohibited to travel to mosques other than these three. This led the prominent Shafi`i scholar Imam Al-Juwayni (d.1085 CE) to issue a religious ruling that it is prohibited to do so. Imam Al-Nawawi (d.1277), who belonged to the same school of *fiqh* (Islamic Law), rendered the position of Al-Juwayni erroneous, and that the majority of scholars (*jumhur al-'Ulama'*) understand the Hadith as saying that "there is no [extra] merit in traveling to other mosques."

The journey by night had Jerusalem as a transit station or as a gate to the heavens. God could have taken His Prophet (Peace be upon him) directly from Mecca to heaven, but He didn't. Al-Aqsa Mosque has a very prominent place in the whole event. It was the place where the Prophet (Peace be upon him) led the other prophets and messengers in prayer. This act is interpreted, among other things, as inheriting the responsibility and becoming custodians of the mosque.

Bayt Al-Maqdis, Jerusalem, became the first Qiblah or direction of prayer. Al-Bara' said:

> "We have prayed with the Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) in the direction of Bayt Al-Maqdis for sixteen or seventeen months. Then we were directed to the Ka`bah [in Mecca]." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Despite the change of the Qiblah, the mere fact that Muslims prayed in the direction of Jerusalem is an indication of its prominence in Islam. According to the Qur'an, however, the mosque in Mecca was the first ever established by God for humanity, so it should not be surprising that the Qiblah was shifted back to it:

> "The first House [of worship] appointed for men, was that at Bakkah [Mecca]: full of blessing and of guidance for all the worlds." (Qur'an, 3: 96)

The same position is confirmed in a hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim:

> Abu Dhar Al-Ghafari (May God be pleased with him) said:
> "I said: O Messenger of Allah: Which mosque was established first on earth?
> He said: Al-Masjid Al-Haram [in Mecca].
> I said: Then which one?
> He said: Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem].
> I said: How much time was between them?"
> He said: Forty years, and when it is time for prayer, wherever you are, pray, for that is where the merit is."

The Qur'an teaches that, while a single system of ethics and belief should be common to the revelations and scriptures of all peoples, the specific laws of ritual and behavior may vary in revealed scriptures:

> "... To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but His plan is to test you in what He has given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues." (Qur'an, 5:48)

The second chapter of the Qur'an (verses 142-150) addresses the change of the Qiblah in detail. The basic message is that both directions of prayer are from God and that:

> "... the People of the Book know that that is Truth from their Lord."

Al-Aqsa Mosque structure was developed and the buildings expanded on a large scale during the reign of two seventh- and eighth-century Umayyad Caliphs, Abd Al-Malik Ibn Marwan and his son Al-Walid, to the extent that it surpassed the architectural grandeur of all mosques. The magnificence of the architecture of the Dome of the Rock and the southernmost building within the parameters of Al-Aqsa Mosque is witness to the importance of these holy sites in Islam.

In addition, Um Salamah, wife of the Prophet, said:

> I have heard the Messenger of God (Peace be upon him) saying: "He who initiates the minor Hajj [the *`Umrah*] or Hajj at Al-Aqsa Mosque, God will forgive his prior sins."

There is an addendum to the previous Hadith stating that Um Hakim, daughter of Umayyah Ibn Al-Akhnas, who reported the Hadith of Um Salamah, traveled from Medina all the way to Al-Aqsa Mosque and initiated the minor Hajj from there.
I have seen Muslims early in the morning, after praying the dawn prayer, with men covered in two white unsewn pieces of cloth. They have initiated their *`Umrah*, and they would be heading to Mecca. I usually greet them and talk to them briefly about their upcoming trip. Most of them come from overseas. One of my friends, who came to visit from overseas years ago, spent a whole night sitting on the Mount of Olives meditating and looking at Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Old City. He behaved like a true lover of this city, being absorbed by its magnificence. In a way, he was fulfilling the following tradition.

> Abu Dharr (May God be pleased with him) said: We have discussed while we were with the Messenger of God (May God's peace and blessings be upon him) which is more meritorious, the mosque of the Messenger of God (May God's peace and blessings be upon him) or Bait Al-Maqdis (Al-Aqsa Mosque)? The Messenger of God (May God's peace and blessings be upon him) said: A prayer in this mosque of mine is better than four prayers in it. And how good a place of prayer it is, for soon a man having a piece of land as much as [the length of] the rope [with which he ties] his horse (in another version, the length of his bow), from which he could see Bait Al-Maqdis, it would be better than the whole world, or he said: better than the world and what's in it."

There are many other traditions[11] that extol the importance of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Islam, which for brevity I did not include in this essay. Jerusalem will continue to be coveted for its deeply rooted religious and spiritual meanings, for the archaeology and history of this Canaanite Jebusite city, and for its distinct civilizational force and cultural heritage. The only aspect that is ever-changing and short-lived is the authority of the sojourner.

11 For more prophetic traditions about Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem see: Mustafa Abu Sway, "The Status of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem in the Prophetic Traditions," in Antti Laato, ed., *Understanding the Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Three Abrahamic Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 191-204.

4.

Muslim Attachment to Jerusalem is Genetic

Dr. Hisham Khatib

Although I was born in Acre, Palestine, I lived all the years of my youth in Jerusalem. As I became the city's (electrical) engineer, I had a close integration and interaction with the city and its inhabitants.

As is well known in Islam, Jerusalem is the first Kiblah (direction of prayer), as well as the third Sanctuary (after Mecca and Madina in Saudi Arabia). Correspondingly, it has a very significant value in Islam. Pilgrimage is made first to Mecca, second to Madina, and third to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem has a special meaning to the entire city's inhabitants, particularly the Muslims. It is more than a casual relationship or a sentimental attachment. It is so intense as to become genetic. The Muslim inhabitants are proud to belong to the city. The Holy Sanctuary (Al-Aqsa Mosque) is part of the cultural identity of the city's Muslim inhabitants. It is more than a place of prayer; it has important cultural and social functions and significance. If you want to meet somebody, you would tell him to come and meet you at Al-Aqsa Mosque. As

a young man, I used to go and study in the gardens and yards of Al-Aqsa.

This relationship with the city is so deep that it is an integral part of the residents' mentality and livelihood. There is no greater honor to a Muslim than being born in Jerusalem. In spite of the Occupation and its hardships, most of Jerusalem's residents have insisted on remaining in the city. Belonging to the city compensated for a lot of lost income and material belongings.

A special event in Jerusalem is the weekly Friday prayers. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims converge on the Al-Aqsa. During prayer times, you can hardly see a Muslim Jerusalemite outside Al-Aqsa. However, the worshippers are not only the city residents; Muslims from all of former Palestine converge on the Al-Aqsa from early morning. Over one quarter of a million Muslims converging on one place. They endure the cold winters and hot summers in order, not only to do their prayers as Muslims, but also to continue belonging to the city.

Things are more intense during the holy month of Ramadan. Tens of thousands of Muslims continue their presence in the Holy Sanctuary to undertake the late night el-Taraweh prayers. There is no more honor to a Jerusalemite Muslim than doing this. It also demonstrates what Jerusalem means to Muslims and how they interact with the city.

The most important monument in Islam is the Kaaba in Mecca, and then immediately following it comes the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock has become a symbol for Jerusalem, as much as the Eiffel Tower is for

Paris, or the Colosseum for Rome. You can identify Jerusalem in pictures by the presence of the Dome of the Rock in the picture's center.

However, Jerusalem to us Muslims is not only its religious significance. It is also the historic, social, and cultural aspects. Jerusalem is full of history; wherever you go, you are faced with its historical heritage and narrative. Almost every past Muslim dynasty had a connection with the city and contributed to its heritage, most notably the Mamluks, Ayyubids, and Ottomans. In the past, most records and books about Jerusalem were focused on its Biblical background and narrative. However, most of the new, recent contributions are more balanced and written not only by Western scholars, but also by local Muslim and Christian Arabs.

When talking of Jerusalem, we do not only mean the Old City inside the walls, but also the communities that surround the Old City, including Silwan, El Tur, Ras al-Amud, Al-Thawri, and so forth. Members of all these communities converge on the Old City almost daily, mainly during Fridays. It is the center of their lives.

Photography plays a central role in documenting the Holy City. One of the finest historical photographic records is that of Jerusalem through the last two centuries. Since photography was invented in 1839, hundreds of photographers have visited the city and recorded its historic sites and people. These were mostly Western photographers, but during the past century, local photographers (Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Armenians) have made their contributions. Many modern

books document their valuable photographic contributions and records of the city.

Not only is Jerusalem history; it is also civilization and cultural heritage—the schools, the charity institutions, and the sabils (avenues). Almost every building inside the Old City had a history of its own. That history was perpetuated through the ages and is kept alive by the present generation.

The Israeli occupation of the Old City in 1967 was a blow to the Islamic narrative of the city. It caused a derailing of the past historic perspective. However, the Arab Jerusalemites are now regaining their stamina and cultural initiatives. They are now repairing their institutions and contributing to its Islamic cultural perspective.

Whoever controls Jerusalem, it will remain one of the most historically important cities in the world, especially for its Muslim inhabitants and Muslims all over the world. In Amman, Jordan, for instance, there are at least ten cultural societies and charitable funds that have "Jerusalem" as part of their titles, and so also banks. They were established not only by former Jerusalemites who, since the Occupation, have immigrated to Jordan, but also by culturally conscious Arabs living in Jordan. The same applies, to a lesser degree, in almost every Muslim country.

Jerusalem means a lot to Muslim perspectives and reflections. You have to be Jerusalemite to appreciate this phenomenon fully. This attachment prompted me to devote most of my energies to preserving the heritage of the city. With my limited means, I have collected, over many years,

documentation, books, photography, lithography, and other items connected with the city. My collection is one of the largest about Jerusalem still in private hands. I am leaving all this for public records and ownership.

The Muslim Holy Sanctuary in Jerusalem is not only the center of admiration to Muslims, but also to the inhabitants of and visitors to the Holy City. I am now editing a manuscript, dated to the year 1901, in which is found the travel journal of a young English lady in the Holy Land. The following is what she recorded about her visit to the Holy Sanctuary in January of that year:

> *We entered by a long covered passage then through a large gate, then the beauty of the buildings before us burst suddenly upon our sight, around us was a large paved court, it was bounded to our left at the far end by some very picturesque buildings, a tall tower among them being the tower of Antonia. Before us, in all the beauty of the sunlight was the Dome of the Rock itself, the form may be seen in photographs but the colours of the magnificent dome are past description—the blue and the white and the gold—sufficient it is for me to say that a visit to the Dome of the Rock alone, amply repaid me for any fatigue, trouble, or expense, which I had had in the long voyage out from England.*
>
> *Wandering round the enclosure we passed through a gateway of arches which were very beautiful but were not*

improved with having been "done up," for the Emperor of Germany's visit. The scales of judgement are said to be going to hang from these arches on the last day.

Then to the north of the Mosque we were shewn a little building—Kubbbet el Miraj [Qubbat al-Miraj]—erected to the memory of Mohammed's ascension into heaven.

Just before entering the Mosque we passed the Dome of the Chain—David's judgement place.

We then turned into the Dome of the Rock itself, we were obliged to remove our shoes before we were allowed to enter, how lovely it was, the beautiful marble pillars, and the bright mosaics above. The rock is in an enclosure, in the centre; it is here Abraham is said to have been going to offer up Isaac.

We now turned our steps towards the Mosque of El Aksa [Al-Aqsa] still within the temple enclosure—outside of it on the large praying ground was a man swaying backwards and forwards at prayer. Later on, we saw thirty or forty of them all praying at once.

Passing through a beautiful archway, we entered a large open space with beautiful pillars forming aisles up the middle; the floor was covered with matting and carpets and there were curious wooden troughs about which were for

the use of visitors so that they could leave their shoes there while they were engaged in praying.

At the far end we saw what is said to be the footprint of Christ, also a very beautifully carved old pulpit, but the interior of the dome itself is the most lovely combination of colour I have ever seen...

Jerusalem with its Islamic and Christian monuments and heritage means a lot to Muslims, in particular to Jerusalemites. Since the seventh century, it has been, and still is, in the worthy custody of Muslims. Now, the Hashemite Royal Family of Jordan—which is directly descended from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali bin Abu Talib, who was also the Prophet's paternal first cousin and the fourth Rightly-Guided Caliph—is the custodian of these holy sites.

5.

What Jerusalem Means for Muslims

Sheikh Maher Assaf

Jerusalem has special importance in all monotheistic faiths. All Muslims of all sects and orientations, all Muslim nations from North to South, look to Jerusalem as a holy site and ideological focus associated with the Qur'an, which cannot be compromised or ignored.

Jerusalem is the first Qibla for Muslims. Al-Aqsa Mosque, which was explicitly mentioned in al-Isra' and al-Mi'raj, was the Qibla to which the Prophet Muhammad prayed in the early period of Islam.

Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhra)

Jerusalem is the city of prophets and the gateway of earth to heaven. It has been enshrined in the Qur'an, in the Prophet's Sunnah, as well as in Islamic culture and civilization through various stages of history. It is an essential part of Palestinian history and life, and the path to peace.

Jerusalem in the Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an has clear references to Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem, and Palestine in a number of verses, which reveal their religious sanctity. Surah Al-Anbiya (The Prophets) Ayat 71 says, "We will lead him and Lut to the holy land that we blessed for the whole world."

The universality of Jerusalem is clearly inherent in religious and cultural monotheism. Jerusalem should be a city of peace and a city open to all human beings. However, this has not been achieved throughout history, including today, as each power wants to control it by aggression, brute force, and injustice.

Other Qur'anic verses include:

1. "Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing." (Surah Al-Isra' 17:1).

In this verse, God speaks openly and shows that what is meant by the Al-Aqsa Mosque is the Holy House, which is today known as the Holy Mosque, which includes al-Aqsa Mosque

building, and next to it is the Dome of the Rock Mosque, which is surrounded by a golden dome.

2. "And We conveyed to the Children of Israel in the Scripture that, "You will surely cause corruption on the earth twice, and you will surely reach [a degree of] great haughtiness." (Surah Al-Isra' 7:4).

The earth in this verse is Jerusalem and Palestine, and even some scholars, such as Al-Shawkani, said, "What is meant by the land is the land of Sham and the Holy House."

3. "O my people, enter the Holy Land which Allah has assigned to you and do not turn back [from fighting in Allah's cause] and [thus] become losers." (Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:21).

The Holy Land is Palestine, and this verse means that God ordered the children of Israel to enter the Holy Land that they were commanded to enter, and it is not meant to write a deed of ownership for any property. Jerusalem and its surroundings from the land of Palestine are the Holy Land, and some have gone further and made Jerusalem and all the territory holy land.

4. "And We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones, which We had blessed. And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of what they

had patiently endured. And We destroyed [all] that Pharaoh and his people were producing and what they had been building." (Surah Al-A'raf 7:137).

That which we had blessed is the land of Palestine.

5. "And to Solomon [We subjected] the wind, blowing forcefully, proceeding by his command toward the land which We had blessed. And We are ever, of all things, Knowing." (Al-Anbya 21:81).

That is, Jerusalem, Palestine, and the rest of the Levant.

6. "And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign and sheltered them within a high ground having level [areas] and flowing water." (Surah Al-Mu'minun)

The high ground is the land in Palestine close to the coast.

There are more than fifteen other places mentioned in the Qur'an that speak of the land of Jerusalem, Palestine, and the Levant. All of these are conclusive indications of Palestine's association with the universal religious message, because God is the Lord of the Worlds, and the Prophet of Islam has been described by God in the Qur'an: "Say, o people, I am the messenger of God to all of you." Muhammad communicated a universal message, not a local one. In many places, Allah mentioned Palestine and linked it to the whole world, not

to any particular peoples and nations. He added a general description when he said that "the land is inherited by my righteous servants."

Jerusalem in Heritage (Prophet's Sunnah)

As in the Qur'an, the Sunnah emphasizes the sanctity of Jerusalem in particular and Palestine in general. There were many discourses that show the importance of Jerusalem and its virtue in religion because it has to do with the first Qibla and the miracle of Isra and Mi'raj, as is clearly indicated in Surat al-Isra'.

Examples abound:

1. The first of the two Qibla after the Prophetic Mission:

   Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, prayed toward the Holy House, sixteen or seventeen months.

2. The second mosque placed in the ground:

   Abu Zar, may God bless him, he said: "O Messenger of God, what mosque has a first status?" He said, (The Haram Mosque). I said, "Then which?" He said, "Then the Al-Aqsa Mosque." I said, "How much was there between them?" He said, "Forty," and then he said, "Wherever the prayer realizes you are behind prayers, then earth is yours, a mosque." (Narrated by the sheikhs, according to Sahih al-Bukhari)

3. Pulling the travelers to Al-Aqsa Mosque:

   As for Abu Said al-Khudri, may God rest his soul, he said, "The pilgrims are only drawn to three mosques: the Mosque of al-Haram, the Mosque of Al-Aqsa, and my mosque." (Narrated by the sheikhs, according to Sahih al-Bukhari)

4. Prophet Muhammad's description of the Holy House to Quraysh:

   Jaber bin Abdullah, may God rest him in peace, said he heard the Prophet of God say, "When Quraysh lied to me, I was in Alone, and God showed me The Holy House, and I started telling them about his verses and I was looking at it." (Narrated by the sheikhs, according to Sahih al-Bukhari).

5. Glorifying Muslims for The Holy House:

   Ibn Abbas said, A woman complained. She said, "If I'm healed, I will pray in Al-Aqsa, and she was healed so she prepared herself to go to pray in Al-Aqsa; then came Prophet Mohammad's wife to her and she said, "Sit down, and eat what I made." Pray at the Mosque of the Prophet. I heard the Prophet say, "There is a prayer in which there is better than a thousand prayers in other mosques, except the Mosque of the Kaaba." (Narrated by a Muslim)

6. The Prophet's prayer is in him on the journey of Al-Isra' and Mi'raj:

   Anas Ibn Malik, the Messenger of Allah, said, "I came with the flash (a long white bear) over the donkey and without

the mule, and I sat on it; then I was in Al-Aqsa Mosque and then I prayed in it. (Hadith, which is part of al-Mi'raj's hadith, is narrated by a Muslim and others.)

7. The virtue of al-Aqsa Mosque:

   Abu Zar said, "O Messenger of God, praying in your mosque is the best, or is it a prayer in The Holy House?" (He said, A prayer in my mosque is better than four prayers in it, and for the prayer is the land of the Jamed and the spread, and may they come to the people in a time and to the flatness of an arch from where the Holy House is better and better than all the world.) (Narrated by Al-Bayhqi; the Albanian said, True.)

8. The land of Jammed and Spread:

   Maymona bint Saad said, "O Messenger of God! We arrived in The Holy House," he said, (The land of the man and the spreader, they have been separated in it, there is a prayer in it like a thousand prayers in others). I said, "I saw if I couldn't take it?" He said: (So you give him oil to saddle it, and if he does that, he is like the one who came to him.) (Narrated by Abu Dawood, Ibn Maja, al-Tabrani, and corrected by the Albanian.)

9. Call for the residence of Beit Al-Maqdis:

   a. Form Shaddad Bin Aws, he was with the Messenger of God, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, while he was there for himself.

The Prophet said to him: "What is the matter?
Shaddad said: This world has narrowed me,

b. On the finger, May God bless him, he said: "I said, O Messenger of God: "'If we get wet after you to stay, where do you command us?'" He said: "On you in the holy house, may you have offspring who will go to that mosque and go." (Narrated by Ahmed 16196))

This religious heritage, which constitutes the doctrine of Muslims that this land is a holy land, is the first Qibla to which the Muslim prays five times daily, and it is also the center of the Isra' and the Mi'raj, and the good work in which it has its own place. All these pieces of evidence confirm that Jerusalem and Palestine are linked to the Palestinian, Arab, Christian, and Muslim consciences.

I emphasize for the Christians that the verses of the Qur'an speak of the prophecy and the wisdom and the birth of Christ, which are read in a Qur'anic text that embodied the events of the birth of Christ in detail in a scene that reflects the sanctity and blessing of this land, which must be for the worlds, and shows that the people of Palestine were before the Prophet Abraham on this earth and are the guardian and protector of this land to remain open to the worlds.

Jerusalem in My Palestinian Memory

First Memory

Since childhood, I have had the good fortune of reaching Jerusalem from Bethlehem via the Beit Sahour bus, which arrived daily at the heart of Jerusalem. The first thing that caught my attention as I traveled through time is how the city embodies love and hope. Those trees, those old houses on the right and left have a Palestinian imprint, and declare the place Palestinian. The Old City wall rising in front of me with its huge stones, the diversity of the market, the sellers' voices were interrupted by heavily-armed Israeli soldiers asking a young man about his identity card.

The walk down Bab Al-Amoud (Damascus Gate) led to the inner wall, the gates of the Haram ash-Sharif. The golden dome of Dome of the Rock, studded with Qur'anic verses, and the arches and dome of Al-Aqsa Mosque fascinated me. I can still hear the sweet voice of Abdullah Yusuf as he read the al-Isra' verse.

Second Memory

On September 15, 2000, my wife Amal, my two daughters Nour and Dania, and I visited our ancestral village of Allar, located southwest of the Old City of Jerusalem. We came to be with our family for a little while, to meet for the first time since the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1947-48. We have spent the last 52 years in dispossession and exile. Most Palestinians who were ejected from the homeland became refugees, living at the mercy of the United Nations and other powers.

My grandfather lived in more than seventeen places in Palestine, including Bethlehem, Jericho, Jerusalem, and Ramallah, before settling in the Palestinian refugee camp of Qalandia. Thereafter, he moved to the city of Zarqa in Jordan, where he died a stone's throw from Jerusalem.

The family reunion was highly emotional, to say the least. The feelings were mixed, shifting between joy and sadness, crying and laughter. We embraced and spoke in the tongue of silence.

We almost lost hope of seeing Allar and our house again. A settler called "Esther" came out from my Grandfather's house and said, "Where are you from?" So we responded by asking her, "Where are you from?" She answered, "I live here but I am from Russia." She added, "Sorry, the war caused it." An irreplaceable apology of humanity, a humanity encapsulated in injustice and compulsive occupation, and the falsification of facts.

Third Memory

One evening in 1991, my sister Fatima and I were watching a film about Nazism and the persecution of the Jews. One of the scenes was so tragic that my sister was deeply affected by the film. Suddenly, the soldiers of the occupation entered our home without warning or permission. After asking me for my ID card, they blindfolded me, tied my hands, and took me to al-Thahryeh, the Detention Center, where I spent hours of torture, interrogation, and isolation.

The detective asked me about people I know, why I go to Jerusalem, and why I pray at al-Aqsa. I replied, "Has prayer become a crime? Is going to Al-Aqsa forbidden?" Then I got banned from reaching Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque.

Although this memory bleeds constantly, my consciousness is filled with beautiful memories, full of love of Jerusalem, its land, and its holy places.

Fourth Memory

My wife is a daughter of Jerusalem. Her father and grandfather were born in the holy city. She was educated in Jerusalem and completed her university studies there. I proposed to her in 1993, we were married, and we moved to Bethlehem, which is 9 km (5.59 miles) to the south of Jerusalem. For more than twenty years, she has been working in Jerusalem in a school for disabled children. She pays taxes and national insurance, but she has been deprived of all her rights, like thousands of Palestinian men and women, including renewal of her identity card, medical services, and open travel—all because she married a Palestinian living in the West Bank.

We—Palestinians—believe in peace as the solution to the Palestinian issue, which has not been achieved despite decades of peace negotiations. Peace should be based on international legitimacy and the full rights of the Palestinian people to establish their state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital as well as the return of refugees and the removal of settlements.

6.

The Meaning of Jerusalem Through My Mother's Memories and My Faith

Dr. Imam Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad

I am a Palestinian-American Muslim. Although I was taken away from it while still in my mother's womb, Palestine is my motherland in a multi-dimensional sense. My mother was not only born and raised in Jerusalem, but she was named for it. Her name was "Qudsia," the feminine form of *al-quds,* "The Holy (one)," the Arabic name for Jerusalem. My father is from a small village just outside of Jerusalem, called Bir Nabala. The Israelis have expanded the boundary of the city to the point where it impinges now on my father's village.

In 1947, my father returned to Palestine from America to find a wife. He had left Palestine while yet a boy. His parents had both died, and his eldest sister had to raise the family. His older brother Mustafa decided to come to America to earn money to support the family. At his sister's request, Mustafa took twelve-year-old Hassan with him to make her burden a little easier, removing the about-to-turn-teenager from the passel of children for which she had to care. Now he was back, looking for a life-mate, and the college-educated city

girl, school teacher, and radio pioneer (the first woman to read the news on Jerusalem radio) seemed the ideal wife to hold up under the cultural shock of a move to America.

My mother was pleased to marry this handsome and very intelligent, albeit uneducated, man, but she did not want to forsake her beloved homeland or the environs of the city for which she was named. If he wanted to marry her, he would have to stay in Palestine. He gladly agreed, and, in November 1947, they wed. And I took up residence in her womb.

In May 1948, less than six months into her pregnancy, the massacre at Deir Yassin took place. My mother had a student from Deir Yassin, and the stories of how the terrorists had split open the bellies of pregnant women to rip out the fetuses and stamp on them had their intended effect. She was terrorized, and she changed her mind. She would leave family and her ancestral homeland to come to a country she did not know to keep her baby safe from danger.

By the time she got her visa, my mother was too close to term to be allowed to fly on an airplane. They booked passage on the *Marine Carp* instead, and, ten days before the due date, I was born on board. I would not set foot on the land in which I was conceived until thirty-two years later. My knowledge of Jerusalem would come to me through my mother's memories and the religion in which she raised me.

Jerusalem Through My Mother's Memories

Raised in America, I envied my classmates who personally knew their grandparents. I knew mine only through my mother's memories and a photograph of my grandfather in his fez and Ottoman mustache. He had been an assistant to the Ottoman governor of Jerusalem, and his marriage to an Arab woman of Jerusalem spared his life from the anger of the mob during the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918.

I had met only one of my maternal uncles, who had come to the United States to study. He passed on a flavor of my homeland through his playing of the lute, an instrument he left behind when his studies were done and he returned home. It hung on my mother's wall until her passing, when it was inherited by my niece, now a musician in New York City. Of my mother's other brothers, known to me only through her reminiscences, Lutfi was a memorable rascal. One time he got into trouble by sneaking up on a Jewish neighbor and clipping off one of his sidelocks.

My uncle's juvenile mischief notwithstanding, the image my mother painted of the relations with her non-Muslim neighbors (the "People of the Book" as the Qur'an calls them) was warm and convivial. She would tell me how she would accompany her Christian neighbors as they walked the Stations of the Cross. Muslims do not believe that Jesus (peace be upon him) had been crucified (for the Qur'an says that was only what God had made appear to be the case), but that did not stop her from sharing in the spirit of their holidays, as they

would share in the Muslim Eids (feast days), when Muslim tradition demands that the meals marking the end of the month of fasting be shared with all close enough to smell the food.

In some ways, life in Jerusalem was atypical for my mother. She was a graduate of the Jerusalem Women's College. A picture of her graduating class now hangs in my living room. There were only two dozen graduates that year, a testament to the rarity of higher education for women in Jerusalem in the first half of the twentieth century. Her family was too poor to send more than one child to college, and tradition would have demanded that it be Lutfi rather than Qudsia. But Lutfi was not the academic type and urged his father to let his studious sister go because she would appreciate it more. Fortunately, my grandfather's good sense prevailed over tradition, and he conceded.

Once out of college, my mother not only took up teaching, but also got a job with the Palestine Broadcasting System. There she produced award-winning programs on the history of Islam and of the region. She even got to read the news one time when the regular announcer failed to show up. She did not enjoy the experience, as by that time the conflicts between the newly arrived Zionists and the indigenous peoples had become so seriously violent that, she said, she wept as she read the reports.

Her tears are another memory of Jerusalem. I cannot forget the day I came home from school to hear her crying. No child should have to hear his mother cry. It is for parents to dry the tears of their children. Young children do not know how to dry the tears of their parents.

"Why are you crying?' I asked her.

"I am so homesick," was her reply. She missed her family, her neighbors, the sights and the sounds of the holy city. I cannot remember if I was six or eight or ten when this happened. I only remember feeling helpless. It was something about which I could do nothing.

Jerusalem Through My Religion

When I was about to enter fourth grade, I began to ask my mother questions about religion. She gave me a copy of the Qur'an that included Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation into English. I began my serious study of Islam, which continues to this day. Within the narrative of Islam is a tale of three cities: Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. The significance of Jerusalem as the city of David, Solomon, Jesus, and Muhammad is the way it links three different religious communities into a single religious history. David, Solomon, and Jesus (peace be upon them all), who lived in Jerusalem, are mentioned more often by name in the Qur'an (16, 25, 17 times respectively) than Muhammad (four times, peace be upon him). And Moses (peace be upon him)—for whom the Holy Land was the object of his flight from Egypt, although he never made it to Jerusalem—is mentioned by name 135 times. Mary or Maryam, Mother of Isa or Jesus, is the only woman named in the Qur'an, with her name appearing seventy times. The 19th chapter or sûrah of the Qur'an is named after her.

This significance is expanded upon by the Hadith (traditional reports about things the Prophet said and did) recounting his "Night Journey" to Jerusalem. The event is alluded to in the Qur'an in the passage (17:1): "Glory to (God) Who took His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque [*Masjid-al-Harâm*, in Mecca] to the farthest Mosque [*al-Aqsa*, in Jerusalem], whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who hears and sees (all things)." The traditions state that the Prophet was transported to Jerusalem (whether materially or in a vision is irrelevant to the point), where, united with all the previous prophets, he prayed together with them to the One God.

This significance of Jerusalem is also attested to by the fact that it was the original *qibla*, or direction of prayer. When the qibla was changed to Mecca, the Qur'an explained (2:142) that "To God belong both East and West" and (2:177) that righteousness lies not in facing a particular physical direction, but in belief and good deeds.

This significance of Jerusalem can be seen not only in the religious texts, but in Muslim history as well. When Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattāb conquered Jerusalem in 637, he neither slaughtered the Christian inhabitants (as the Persians had done to the Christians when they conquered the city twenty-three years earlier and as the Crusaders did to the Muslims four centuries later) nor expelled them, but allowed them to remain. When the appreciative Patriarch Sophronius invited him to pray inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Umar

declined, explaining that, although it was not forbidden for him to do so, he feared some future Muslims, more zealous about religious identity than observant of religious law, might use his having prayed there as an excuse to convert the church into a mosque. In later generations, some Christians accused Umar of betraying them by letting Jews into the city, but had he made any promise to keep them out, it would not have been legal under Islamic law.

My Visit to Jerusalem

Not until I was in my thirties would I finally set foot on the ground of my mother's native city. My father had become afflicted with cancer and sought to cross a major item off his bucket list by taking his children to visit Palestine. My brother Maher, my new bride Frances (for whom this would be our honeymoon), and I eagerly accepted. After spending a week with some cousins in Amman, we would spend a week in the home of my mother's big sister in the Old City.

When I told my mentor, Harvard Professor Robert Nozick, about my forthcoming trip, he urged me not to take as discrimination the close search we would receive from the Israeli border guards, assuring me that everyone, even Jews like himself, received the same scrutiny. I think he failed to notice some subtle differences in treatment. On the day we crossed over the Allenby Bridge from Amman to Jerusalem, I, with an Arab name, but traveling on an American passport and with an American accent, got through customs in 25 minutes.

For my parents, with American passports but Palestinian accents, it took 50 minutes. For my cousin, a permanent resident of Jerusalem, it took the WHOLE DAY. Knowing that it would, she had left Amman after dawn prayers. We waved to her as she cooled her heels in the waiting room in the late morning, and she joined us in my aunt's house for supper late that afternoon.

As we approached the city, our car, identified by the license plate color as owned by a Palestinian, was stopped by the Israeli police. When the officer poked his head into the car he saw my very American-looking wife in the back seat next to me and hastily explained, "I'm just checking to make sure your seat belts are fastened." How thoughtful.

My aunt's five-hundred-year-old house is ensconced within the walls of the Old City, near Herod's Gate or Bab as-Zahra. Except for the master bedroom and the *tabûn* (a special kitchen for baking bread), every room is adjacent to the central courtyard, which itself is partly covered by a grape arbor. The grapes were not yet ripe, but had we come a month later, I think I could have just reached up and grabbed myself a fresh snack.

My aunt had always spoiled her little sister. Her hospitality, as well as that of her husband and their daughters, now was incredible. As Frances and I were newlyweds, they insisted we take the master bedroom, a lovely chamber with a cathedral ceiling. They did not want us to lack anything, which caused an awkward moment after our supper.

My aunt asked us what we wanted to do that evening, and Frances said she would like to go out for ice cream. A deathly silence fell upon the household. My aunt spoke little English, so finally my cousin explained the cause of their embarrassment: The ice cream parlor was in a section of the city closed off to non-Jews at night. "I don't need ice cream," Frances reassured our hosts.

The next day, we made our way past soldiers armed with rifles to a camp filled with "internally displaced" refugees. The day after that, Frances had traded in her touristy-looking straw hat for a Muslim style headscarf that provoked visible affection from the locals we met.

Then, we went to the market to engage in some old-fashioned haggling. My cousin had tutored me on exactly the tone of voice to take in responding to a shop-keeper's opening price with an incredulous "*shooo*?" ("Whaaaaat?") Frances admired an embroidered caftan. How much? They gave a price. "*Shooo*?" I said. I offered one fourth of what they asked. Impossible. They offered half. We walked out. They chased after us into the narrow old city street. OK. Deal.

One day we took a day trip to Ramallah, stopping at my father's village of Bir Nabala. I finally was able to meet the aunt who had raised the family while her brothers went to America to support them. She had not seen her little brother in over thirty years. Every time my brother or I got near her, she would begin to whisper prayers over us.

Bir Nabala means "well of Nabala." I asked if it were possible to drink of the water of the well. The locals seemed

surprised that anyone would want to drink of the well water when piped water was available, but I insisted. The water was brackish, but to me the drink was a satisfying coming-home ritual. We then took a walk to the ruins of the house in which my father grew up, destroyed by an earthquake. Later I was shown the room in which I was conceived. Afterward I stood on the roof of that house and looked at the moon over the Jerusalem suburb and at a nearby hilltop where settlers were building their illegal homes.

My aunt's neighbor was a professional tour guide, and we joined his tour starting at the Garden of Gethsemane. He said he always took his shoes off there because it is holy ground. We took in the panorama of the city below us, dominated by the golden Dome of the Rock. Beside it is the smaller silver dome of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Then, at prayer time on Friday we were there, less than a 10-minute walk from my aunt's house.

As we entered the plaza, a Muslim guard shouted at Frances, but backed off when my mother shouted back at him. The Al-Aqsa Mosque was full, so I had to pray on the plaza between the two mosques. The women got to pray in the more impressive Dome of the Rock. I got to pray there later after it had emptied out. On my way in, I saw a hole in the wall made by Israeli fire during the June 1967 War. Mosque officials refused to repair it so that no one could ever forget.

Inside, I positioned myself so that I was facing both Mecca and the large rock where some believe that Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him, mentioned by name in the Qur'an 69

times) prepared for the sacrifice of his son. The Qur'an does not name the son in question but, like the Bible, says it was his only son at the time. There was a time when Ishmael (peace be upon him, mentioned by name 11 times in the Qur'an) was his only son and never a time when his second son, Isaac (peace be upon him, mentioned by name 15 times), was the only son, so Muslims conclude the son in question was Ishmael. The fact that the Qur'an makes no mention of the name tells Muslims that the story of Abraham's sacrifice is about the love of God, not about real estate.

I was removed from Jerusalem, but Jerusalem will never be removed from me.

7.

Jerusalem, My Father, and Me

Dr. Azzam S. Elayan

For as long as I can remember, I wanted my father to take me with him to Jerusalem. Growing up in the refugee camp of Dehaisha, I only heard stories about Jerusalem in my formative years. These stories were communicated to me through conversations with my parents, especially my father, who worked in Jerusalem for over twenty-two years, my older brother Adnan, other relatives, teachers, and friends who were lucky enough to have been to Jerusalem. And, of course, from my paternal aunt Jamilah, who lived in the same two-room cinder-block house along with my parents, four brothers, four sisters, and me. She, like my father, was completely blind, and, like my father, she followed the news closely, and no more so than when the news pertained to Jerusalem because, in part, it is where her brother worked. It was also because she had an abiding love for the city as a Palestinian, and an appreciation for its spiritual centrality to her faith as a devout Muslim.

I dare say that virtually everyone in Dehaisha felt the same way. Like all other refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Dehaisha was constructed by the United Nations

in the early 1950s for Palestinians who had lost their homes, villages, towns, livelihoods, and many loved ones in the 1948 war, which culminated in the creation of the State of Israel and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. The camp is situated at the southern outskirts of Bethlehem and is only nine miles south of Jerusalem; nonetheless, Jerusalem seemed to me at times like an unattainable, far away destination. Those from whom I learned about Jerusalem invariably described its historic sites, narrow streets and alleyways, tiny shops of spices, sweets, and fabrics. Of course, they also spoke in endearing terms about its holy worship and pilgrimage destinations, especially *Al-Haram Al-Shareef Sanctuary*, which houses *Al-Aqsa* Mosque and *Qubbat Al-Sakhra* (Dome of the Rock, or just *Al-Sakhra*, pronounced *Assakhra*) Mosque, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

As a child, none of those religious, political, or geographic considerations meant much or mattered to me, although stories involving the Dome of the Rock always intrigued me. In particular, the story of the ascension of Prophet Mohammad to Heaven from the rock around which the mosque was later built dazzled my imagination and challenged, as it still does today, my most basic sense of logic.

Regarding Jerusalem, I was generally focused on three objectives between ages seven and nine. As I recall, foremost on my mind was eating a Jerusalem falafel sandwich with *shatta*, a hot sauce especially made for having with falafel and or hummus. I so longed for eating this sandwich. For years, I had to listen to my brother Adnan, who is almost two years

older than I, extol the delicious taste of the Jerusalem falafel sandwich, which he had on several occasions when he would accompany my father to the mosques on various Fridays. Since he was the older son, he was always given the option first to go with my father, which I always thought was terribly unfair. The given reason was always his "great knowledge" of the city. My father found his way around the city more than well during every workday, from Saturday through Thursday, and so, why would he need Adnan or anyone as a "seeing eye" on Fridays? Adnan used to brag about how awesome his day in Jerusalem was and the heavenly taste of the Jerusalem falafel sandwich (of course, with *shatta*) he had on that day. As we got older and I became somewhat more assertive, I insisted that I had earned the right at the age of nine to be the son who gets to go with our father to Jerusalem one Friday during the summer. Adnan did not object as much as he consistently did on other Fridays because he was going with a friend to see a matinee movie featuring one of his favorite karate stars, Bruce Lee, on that Friday. The movie seemed like a divine intervention. One thing my eldest brother loved more than anything is going to the movies. He was not about to miss the opening of the Bruce Lee movie at Cinema Bethlehem, even when it meant forgoing the Jerusalem trip. That is where I came in, more than willing to take my place as my dad's cane and seeing eye for the day, all the while thoughts of a Jerusalem falafel sandwich and its virtual aroma ran marathons across my head.

One other objective I had was to see my father's place of work and to meet some of the eccentric people he worked with

at The Arab Association for the Blind on *Tareeq Al-Alaam* ("Street of Pains" in Arabic, also known as Via Dolorosa), about half a city block from its intersection with the main throughway in the center of the Old City. It is less than one mile from *Al-Haram Al-Shareef.* Those folks were central to many of the stories he told about work over the years.

My final objective concerning Jerusalem, as a Muslim kid, was obviously to explore the *Al-Aqsa* and *Al-Sakhra* mosques. More than simply praying at either, I vividly recall wanting to explore the elegant writing of verses from *Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem* (The Generous Qur'an in Arabic), the intricate Islamic art and mosaic on the walls of both mosques. I have always been interested, even then, in stylized writing, calligraphy, and geometric arts, the latter owing much of their origins to various genres of Islamic art.

As my father and I were leaving the house, Adnan said, "Be careful down the steps coming from the road to *Bab El Amud* (Damascus Gate); some of the steps are high." Without giving it a moment's thought, I shouted, "Adnan, don't worry, I'll hold dad's left hand so he can hold the cane in his right hand." He blurted out, "This may not end well!" He insisted that I "look in front of you and don't get distracted." My father and I walked about half a mile from our neighborhood in East Dehaisha to the main road connecting Hebron to Jerusalem and passing through Bethlehem. However, several Hebron-Jerusalem buses passed by without stopping; they were all packed with worshippers heading to *Al-Haram Al-Shareef.* So we ended up taking the Dehaisha-Bethlehem bus to *Qubbat Rahil* (Rachel's

Tomb,) where the bus dropped us off and recommended that we wait for one of the Bethlehem-Jerusalem buses. The driver, Abu-Hannah, happened to be a friend of my father for whom my father had caned chairs on multiple occasions and visited at home, along with me, around Easter and Christmas. Abu-Hannah was a thin, bespectacled gentleman who often refused to charge my father for rides to and from Bethlehem. My father thanked Abu-Hannah profusely. Abu-Hannah said he would ask one of the Jerusalem-bound buses to stop for us. Within a few minutes, a bus pulled over and opened its front door, and its driver asked my father, "Are you Sheikh Said?" "Yes," answered my father. The driver asked us to get in and added that our ride was already paid for. He then asked two young men to vacate the two seats closest to the front door, so that my father and I could take those seats. It was the driver's way of granting an accommodation for a blind man and his young boy, or equally likely an accommodation for a friend of a mutual friend, or both.

After several stops, each seeming like an eternity, the thirty-minute trip came to an end at the central bus terminal, approximately one third of a mile diagonally across from *Bab El Amud*, the main gate into the Old City, also known as Damascus Gate. The terminal was jam-packed, but somehow we managed to exit onto the sidewalk of the main road, forging ahead toward the gate. Newsstands and cigarette vendors dotted the sidewalk although the most intriguing vendors to me were the ones selling freshly-baked *kaek bsimsim*, or sesame bread circles, with *za'atar*, which is a blend of dried ground

sumac and thyme, sage and salt, mixed in with sesame seeds. The swirl of aromas was simply difficult to resist, especially when my father offered to buy me the combination. But I did, insisting that I only wanted a Jerusalem falafel sandwich. My father laughed, and we kept walking toward the gate. At some point my father stopped, turned left, and asked whether I could see the main gate, to which I responded in the affirmative. I was shocked by the massive size of the gate with its approximately two-story-high green doors and the jigsaw puzzle silhouette of the gate and the famed Jerusalem wall encasing the Old City. I was transfixed by the enormous span of the gate's ornate arch and asked if we could get closer. My father said that this was the gate which we needed to go through after crossing the street. He squeezed my hand saying, "Look both ways before crossing and don't get distracted."

We safely crossed the road and descended the old, big, cobblestone stairs. With every step we took, I felt an unfamiliar range of emotions and an inexplicable sense of euphoria. My father informed me that the falafel vendor was only a couple of hundred meters after the gate. I immediately asked if it would be okay that we sit by the gate for a little while before going through so that I might have the opportunity to look at it more closely. My father said we should get the sandwiches and then head to *Al-Haram*, instead. Somewhat disappointed, I moved onward with my father, past a gauntlet of more newsstands, cigarette vendors, tiny jewelry stores, and even tinier money-changing shops, just inside and beyond the gate's entrance. A few armed Israeli soldiers were visible on both sides of the pathway as we pressed on and down the stairs.

I suddenly caught a waft of falafel, and almost immediately the falafel vendor was in plain view. My mouth was watering, as it is now just recalling that moment! The vendor said, "What can I get you, Sheikh Said?" My father replied, "Give the boy whatever he wants, Ibrahim. The man turned to me: "What's your name, kid?" I shyly said, "Azzam!" Ibrahim then offered, "Anything you want, I will make it for you," adding, "*Tfadal*" ("please" in Arabic). Knowing exactly what I wanted, I quickly obliged by saying, the "Jerusalem falafel sandwich with shatta!" He and my father started laughing, then Ibrahim yelled to a neighboring spice vendor, "*Ya* (hey) Ali, do you know what this boy wants? He wants a Jerusalem falafel sandwich, not just any falafel sandwich, it has to be a Jerusalem falafel sandwich!" While his laughter escalated and Ali joined in the hysterical laughter, my father said that since we were in Jerusalem, I did not need to include Jerusalem in name of the sandwich. I recall feeling a bit embarrassed: then, however, I could not help but join in the laughter. Still chuckling, Ali said, "Make him the Jerusalem sandwich, and make one for his father, and I will pay for both." Ibrahim quickly shot back, "No way, these two are on me." The Jerusalem falafel sandwich, as I still call it, was the best I have ever had, even after years and years of delicious falafel sandwiches in various places around the world. While eating the sandwich, I felt as if I were in a state of heightened nirvana. According to my father, I made sounds he had never heard me make, sounds he said he would never try to replicate.

After this landmark meal, we continued our way, taking the left prong of the split path toward *Al-Haram*. A few minutes into our walk, we approached a man who was hawking "chilled *kharroob* (carob) juice." We obviously had to stop and have some of this fresh, chilled juice, to quench the thirst generated by the falafel sandwiches. The juice did not disappoint; it was made to perfection. Minutes later, we arrived at another massive gate which, nonetheless, was relatively smaller than the main gate. Walking through that gate, I knew that for as long as I live, I would not forget what my eyes saw at that very moment: *Al-Sakhra*, the Dome of the Rock, in all its splendor, was in plain view, more enchanting, more stunning, more awe-inspiring than my modest horizon, my child's mind could have ever conceived. The only words that could form and leave my little mouth were: *Allah Akbar*, or "God is the Greatest" in Arabic, which in this case meant to convey a sense of wonderment and deep appreciation of the magnificence of what I was seeing. The gold dome was mesmerizing as the sun reflected off its curvature. We walked up the steps and on toward the octagonal structure with the blue mosaic-adorned wall, at which point I was told by my father that we needed to turn right and to perform the "*wodoo*." *Wodoo* means washing up according to the Islamic guidelines for pre-prayer cleanliness. We did so and then walked to the nearest door (one of eight mosque doors), took our shoes off, and placed them in a wooden shoe rack, as hundreds of other worshippers were doing. We stood in one of the rows alongside other men and boys and prayed on thick-textured, elegant wool carpeting. We

then shook hands with each other and with total strangers on both sides of us, as is customary after group prayers.

We sat on the soft carpeting for about an hour during which we borrowed two of the mosque's rosaries and repeated a few prayers over and over again. I left my father's side for a few minutes and walked around, looking very closely, as I had planned to do, at the meticulously written Qur'anic verses embossed across the walls of the interior and exterior of the structure; I was particularly fascinated, even at that age, by the seemingly effortless weaving of intense colors (mainly blue, some red, green, orange with actual gold) to create a contiguous text all around the eight-sided architectural marvel. The only thing that was as compelling as the golden dome of the mosque was the interior of the very same dome. It is an exotic exploration of the limits of human artistry, superb engineering, and genuine craftsmanship. The perfectly symmetrical geometries of branching swirls and alternating semi-circles, separated by bands of Qur'anic verses, were spellbinding. Stained glass windows, in the colors mentioned above along with yellow, teal, pink and purple, lined the span of the dome, as if reaching to the sun in singular illustration of our oneness with the great beyond. I could have spent hours studying only the interlocking verses of the dome; however, I could hear my father calling my name.

Now, my father said, we needed to head over to *Al-Aqsa* Mosque, which is only a couple of hundred meters away. We worked our way through the throngs of worshippers down to *Al-Aqsa* and followed a similar routine inside the mosque as

we had done at the Dome of the Rock. Again, I was utterly captivated by the intricately ornate art of the segmented ceiling, which featured a radiant collage of morphing geometric texts of Qur'anic verses in a range of colors similar to those at the Dome of the Rock. The arches throughout the two mosques, and throughout the Old City and the two halves of Jerusalem, added to the sophisticated, carefully crafted structure of Jerusalem and the sense of divinity ingrained in every cobblestone, every street corner, every one of its seven markets, every stone in its wall, and every one of its eight unique gates (of which seven are in use).

My father and I made our way out of the same sanctuary gate through which we had come in, and then turned right onto the main throughway toward my father's workplace. We passed by several restaurants featuring falafel, hummus, kebab, rotisserie chicken, and shawarma, but I was more focused then on trying some of the dessert delicacies on display in front of one sweets shop after another. Every kind of the sweets before me looked so inviting. I could not decide whether to choose *Awama, Mshabbak, Hilbah, Katayef, Namoura, Baklawa* (Baklava), *Halawah* (Halva), *Mamool,* or my traditional favorite *Knafa*, or one of several others I had never tried or seen previously. I finally settled on *Knafa* and the man who served us threw in a couple of *Awama* balls (dough that is about one inch in diameter, fried to a perfect medium-brown color and glazed in a sweet, sugary, rose-water syrup.) After the dessert, we walked a few blocks till we got to *Tareeq Alalaam* (Via Dolorosa) and then turned left up the street, at my father's directions.

Within half a block, my father, who was a living map, stopped, turned, and said, "This is where I work; read the sign over the door." It was, as it is still today, shocking how he knew where everything was and how, only using his cane, he could find his way around Jerusalem, Bethlehem, or Dehaisha or many of the neighboring villages, including Irtas, the village from which my beloved mother hails. The sign read, "The Arab Association for The Blind." Because it was Friday, which is a day of worship for Muslims, the building was closed. My father reached for his key, but almost simultaneously the door was opened from the inside by a young man who then addressed my father, "*Marhabah, ya* Sheikh, it is Friday and you are here!" My father replied with a smile, "*Marahib habibi*, Rashad, you are here, too, on a Friday," while shaking Rashad's hand and walking inside, with me right behind. "Yes," Rashad responded, "I came in to cut some wood and get it ready for you guys; this will be one of busiest weeks, as you know. It's all done; I'm heading out." Then he added, "This must be another one of your sons," tossing me a warm glance with a wide smile. He shook my hand and said, "Your dad is the best man I know." It was an unexpected, profound confirmation of what I have always believed and still do about my father. "That's very kind of you, Rashad," my father humbly replied. He then returned the compliment with an emphatic tone, "You're the best and kindest carpenter I have ever worked with." They both laughed, and just as Rashad started walking away, he said in a somewhat serious tone, "Stay with your dad, kid, and don't go into the carpenter shop,

please." My father and I proceeded across a lengthy corridor that ended at a short flight of steps and on to a large open yard, followed by another short flight of steps, which put us squarely in front of the carpenter shop. We then continued on to the adjacent room, at which point my father turned right, walked through the open door all the way to a wooden chair on the left side of the room, behind a flat wooden table, one of perhaps seven or eight spread across the room. He sat on the chair, as if to catch his breath. I jumped with the obvious question, "So, this is where you do your work, *yaba* ("dad" in Arabic)?" He responded, "Yes, most of it anyway."

Based on stories he had told at home, his colleagues were middle- to late-middle-aged men who were also blind, except for the young carpenter. This man, Rashad, was especially kind to my father; he would often give him wood trimmings and defective logs that were not suitable for shaping into parts for chairs and brooms. We could not always afford to buy logs for the winter, and so those were very helpful and meant a lot to our family during cold days and nights. My father was an expert at assembling and caning chairs, furnishing them with variations of elegant weaves, just as he was an expert in weaving and assembling brooms with both nylon and wood-based bristles. Wanting to express how much I really wanted to see him while doing his work, I said, almost anxiously, "Next time I come with you, could it be on a workday?" He quickly replied, "Insha Allah, *ya bnayee*" which means "God willing, son" in Arabic, conveying with an affectionate tone an understanding of what I was thinking and feeling. On the

way out, I paused by the door of the carpenter shop and took a long, investigative look inside; I was very intrigued by the electric table saw and an assortment of small hand saws and other equipment. I was about to request permission to take a closer look inside, when my father urgently warned, "Azzam, don't even think about it!"

We left the building and headed toward the main gate, *Bab El Amud*, following the same throughway. The gate was not as crowded in the late afternoon as it had been that morning. A few vendors lined the entrance and nearby area, and a stream of passersby flowed through the gate. One vendor was selling a warm and sweet dairy-based drink called *sahlab* (closest to eggnog in texture) with crushed pistachio toppings. Wanting desperately to study the gate, I asked my father whether we could get some *sahlab* and have it while sitting on the lawn outside the gate, just to the right when facing the gate. He agreed. I spent the next few minutes peppering my father with questions about the wall, the kind of stones used in its construction, its shape, and its historic significance. He was a magnificent, articulate, and knowledgeable educator although he never went to school, any school, except six months of Braille lessons at age sixty. He was a keen listener and a deliberate teacher in ways that must be experienced to grasp and appreciate. At some point, I stopped asking questions, and we both stopped conversing, a rarity amongst the Elayans, as if to let the events of the day percolate down to their ultimate destinations in our intertwined lives. Up until that moment, this day in Jerusalem with my father was the best and most

meaningful day of my life. It will always be a very special day. I cannot think of my father without thinking of Jerusalem, nor can I think of Jerusalem without thinking of my father. It is as though they morphed into one immortal being.

Over the years and decades that followed, I went to Jerusalem numerous times, with both of my parents and/or siblings, and visited the same and other places across East Jerusalem (the Old City) and West Jerusalem. I worked in construction, painted houses, and even sold ice cream (*Rukkab* from Ramallah, the best I tasted then) in both halves of the city. In 2017, my wife, Annie, and our two children, Leila and Adam, then thirteen and eleven, respectively, accompanied me to Jerusalem, where we had (Jerusalem) falafel sandwiches, *Knafa*, and spent an afternoon at Al-*Haram Al-Shareef* Sanctuary. The sense of gratification and fulfillment I felt when I saw our children on the Sanctuary grounds, skipping in between the beams of sunlight reflecting off the golden dome, cannot be overstated. Seeing them run across the splendid carpeting in both mosques brought back that first day that I, and I alone, had spent with my father in Jerusalem. I have many pictures of Leila and Adam from that day, at the sanctuary and various other places, both in East and West Jerusalem. However, I have no pictures, not even one, of my father and me on our memorable day in Jerusalem. Everything he and I did, every place we went, the texture and taste of what we ate, the cadence of his words, the rhythm and rhyme of the narrow streets bouncing off the cobbled stones and off the city wall, and carpenter Rashad's words, "Your father is the best man I know," all still live within

me today. They will indefinitely reside therein. I presume my kids will visit Jerusalem frequently and may one day choose to write about those visits and cumulative experiences. Or, they may choose to write about their first visit with Annie and me, and if I am fortunate, I will have the opportunity to read what Jerusalem means to them as well.

During a snowstorm in the winter of 2014, almost for no logical reason, I thought of my father and the severe hardships he had to endure, to provide sustenance and a decent living for a family of twelve. Perhaps it was the severity of the storm that brought him to mind, although he was never far. As a tribute to my father and to my wife, who sat beside me during that storm, and many storms across the expanse of life together, I wrote the poem below, "Shades of Winter."

Shades of Winter

Winter lingers, drones on
Snowflake by snowflake,
Unyielding grey, icicle-legged ghost
Riding the storm in,
No place elsewhere to go.
We compare our aches,
And the forecast
From our cell phone weather apps,
We resent the looming storm
And the complicity of our apps.
Resigned to the pending grand inconvenience,

We sink deeper into our warm brown couch,
Begin to catalog the span of our lives,
Break down the on days,
The off days,
The sunny days,
The wicked days,
And as we do,
Time splinters around us,
Into distorted memories and awkward expectations.
The years fall from the sky
And shatter into perfect hexagons
Each ornately distinct,
Twisted hours dot the curvature of my mind.
I think of a blind man
Walking the streets of Jerusalem
With nothing to steer him across the cobblestones,
Except a bamboo cane in hand.
He walks the tight alleyways of the Old City
Carrying a burlap sack over his shoulder.
The sack is filled with wood logs,
For my childhood winters,
In another home,
Another land.
The shrapnels of time keep on falling,
Breaking the delicate snowflakes,
Into tiny grains of vanishing moments.
And we wonder,
Is the calendar rigged?

Or are we looking in
Through the smashed ends
Of an unreasonable kaleidoscope?

Said Elayan, father of Azzam Elayan, coming home from work in Jerusalem and walking toward the main gate of the Dehaisha Refugee Camp, while carrying a sack of wood logs on the Hebron-Jerusalem Road. The photo, taken in 1992 by UNRWA photographer George Nehmeh, shows the six-meter barbed-wire fence Israel erected around the camp during the 1987-1993 First Intifada or Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation.

8.

Al-Quds: A Quest for Peace and Justice in A Divided City

Dr. Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Dr. Ilham Nasser

"When you live in Jerusalem you will never be able to forget it." This popular statement is often exchanged among Palestinians who reside in the city and interact with its charm and history, especially those who came from other areas in Palestine, leaving their hometowns to become Jerusalemites.

Of course, as any old and holy city, the meaning of Jerusalem varies because it is shaped by our own lives, experiences, and identities. In fact, who you are makes a huge difference in the way you experience the city: for example, if you are a Palestinian or Israeli; a Muslim or non-Muslim; a religious or a non-religious person; and, importantly, if you are an original Jerusalemite or a newcomer. Thus, the meaning of Jerusalem to us is shaped by the perspective of a young couple who moved from the Galilee to study in the big holy city in the early eighties. After a decade that included experiencing the First Intifada (uprising), we moved to the United States to pursue higher education and occasionally returned to Jerusalem for short visits, but never considered living there.

On the national level, we experienced the two sides of the city and then the annexation of the Old City and East Jerusalem to Israel. Jerusalem has been in a crucible of war and violent conflicts between Arabs and Jews, as early as the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917. The political dynamics and attempts to legitimize it as the ultimate, one, unified capital of Israel have contaminated every interaction of the city's residents, their daily lives, homes, food and water resources, and prayers. This reality has cast its shadow on the city in a massive way since June 1967, when the Israeli military forces declared victory and began the policy of annexation that was legally formalized on July 30, 1980, by the passing of the Jerusalem Law in the Israeli Parliament. The harsh policies and the punishments that were imposed on those who rejected the reunification shaped the meaning of Jerusalem and put people like us on the fence and in between, as we could freely move in both parts of the city and not worry about the ways we were perceived by either part. Nevertheless, as rejecting these policies became an identifier that separated Arabs from Jews in the city, we took part in activities on the Hebrew University campus to reject the annexation and the aftermath of that on the city.

This reality also created an internal Palestinian dynamic in which the labels of "traitor" (*Khayin*) and "nationalist" (*Watani*) were used and abused by certain forces and individuals to promote personal interests and agendas. Despite the claims of the Israeli government and the municipal authority that Jerusalem is a unified city and the massive effort to build new Jewish

settlements surrounding the Palestinian neighbourhoods, the city remained nationally divided. For us as Palestinians, even those who held Israeli passports, we rejected the narrative of domination and control that manifested itself in a huge gap in resource allocation, development plans, and services provided by the municipality. Living in Beit Hanina, in the suburbs of Jerusalem, we witnessed the neighbourhood of Neve Yaakov (Nabi Yaaqoob) being built, developed, and nurtured for its Jewish residents. The same story applied to every Palestinian neighborhood witnessing discriminatory development policies by the city and the government. However, more tragically, we also witnessed the painful reality of many Palestinian families in the Old City who were under daily attacks and harassment by the security forces and the right-wing Jewish settlers, who continuously pushed to confiscate and take control of Arab houses in the Old City. Every month, when we went down to the Old City to pay our rent, we would listen to our landlords, two elders from the Khalidi family, who lived near Via Dolorosa, complaining to us about the waves of Jewish religious groups harassing them and threatening to take over their house.

We lived in Jerusalem between 1980 and 1989. During these years, as young students and peace activists, we discovered the charm and magic of the city. The amazingly diverse mixture of Palestinians, Israeli Jews and Palestinians from Israel, foreign expats, tourists, and others was evident every time we went through *Bab El Amud* (the gate of the pillar), also called the Nablus Gate and the Damascus Gate—because it faces the north, toward Nablus and Damascus—as we could

feel the energy that surrounds the interactions between these individuals and groups. Obviously, on the surface and most visible is the tension resulting from the presence of the Israeli military and security services with the restrictions they impose on the mobility of most people in the Old City and outside, especially in the Palestinian neighborhoods. Living near the Qalandia checkpoint north of Jerusalem and crossing into the occupied territories to get our groceries and supplies, we experienced the division between Jerusalemites and West Bankers imposed by Israel. This horrible reality affected all those who lived in the city, especially the Palestinian neighborhoods, regardless of whether we were from the Galilee or not. In the span of twenty-four hours in Jerusalem, it was inevitable that you heard stories about the torture of gaining entry into the city from the occupied territories. Many of these stories are also about the dislocation of many of our family friends who ended up living beyond the northern, eastern, or southern checkpoints (Ramallah area, Jericho side, and Bethlehem area) or later the Separation Wall. In addition, many other stories are about Muslims having no access to the Holy Mosque, and those young people proudly narrating their manoeuvers to reach the mosque and participate in the Friday prayer.

Each family had its own journey and narrative. One of the large families that lived near the Hebrew University campus on the Mount of Olives was forced to vacate their old house that they had lived in for at least a hundred years, because of the disproportionate taxation and sanctions on illegal

expansion.[12] They relocated to one of the neighborhoods outside of Ramallah and every day commuted to Jerusalem. Later, they were forced to return so that they would not lose their Jerusalem identification card and residency. This situation impacted hundreds of Jerusalemites. We recall listening to feelings of anger, frustration, helplessness, hopelessness, and even hate-filled desires for revenge. In such conversations, it took us a while to shift the discourse of the conversation to feelings of resistance, hope, resilience, survival, empathy, and sympathy, and even to understanding the nuances of the Israeli and Palestinian conflicts and politics that shaped the lives of these families and their stories.

We also lived in the city when it was calmer and before the First Intifada in 1987. We enjoyed its multicultural and multi-religious offerings from both communities: the Jewish Israeli in the west and the Palestinian in the east side. The depth of the Abrahamic spiritual link that can be felt in the two square kilometres of the Al Aqsa Mosque, the Jewish Wailing Wall, and the *Church* of the Holy Sepulchre is incredible for those who seek a spiritual path. There is no other place on earth that encompasses all these three major religions in the same intensity. Despite the messages of Abrahamic unity embedded in each of these faith traditions, their internal divisions are very visible in the heart of Jerusalem. The different groups

12 There are strict regulations on permits for new building or expansion of existing homes. Thus, in the Palestinian neighbourhoods, there is little room for new construction to accommodate the population growth. See statistics on demolition of Palestinian houses in East Jerusalem reported by B'tselem https://www.btselem.org/planning_and_building/east_jerusalem_statistics.

compete among themselves on ownership, control, and regulations within each of these institutions. The place of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in our lives was very significant as we were able to experience it as part of belonging to the city. As we made friends and people hosted us, having a picnic in the surrounding gardens of the "Haram" was a Friday event that we enjoyed tremendously. The area was a community gathering place, and people would bring their lunches and eat together after Friday prayers. Today, the mosque is off-limits to many people, and generations of young Palestinians became adults without seeing the Al-Aqsa or even being able to enter Jerusalem.

Beyond the Arab-Jewish divide that since 1948 has characterized East and West Jerusalem, the city is also divided by religious and secular grouping, especially in the Jewish Israeli areas. Several times, as we walked from the Mount of Olives to the Old City, we were subjected to stone-throwing by young Ultra-Orthodox Jews who were demarking the boundaries of their neighborhood for keeping Sabbath. The conflict between Israeli Jewish religious groups and non-religious groups often resulted in protest and new regulations for movement in the city. Many of the secular Jewish families migrated to the urban areas of Tel Aviv, while the Jewish orthodox and ultra-orthodox groups grew. The taking over of the city by Jewish religious groups gradually affected our movement and ways of living. The religious divide created city enclaves for various communities, such as the night clubs' areas, the coffee shops, and the Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods to stay away from.

Such a divide existed on the Palestinian side as well, however with less visible boundaries due to the nature of the Muslim and Christian religious identities. Nevertheless, Palestinian Muslims and Christians who are not religious or secular have also carved out certain streets and corners that marked their presence in the city.

For over a decade, we both worked for peace and understanding between Arabs and Jews within the Green Line (marking the territories that were under Israeli control between 1948 and 1967). We often brought our trainees and students to Jerusalem to experience the proximity of diverse religious communities and to observe the impact of the national conflicts on the daily lives of the city resident. Jerusalem was a torn city, but with a hope for peace.

Our efforts were mainly focused on the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel. It was clear for us that such programs should not and cannot be implemented between Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem. We rejected and declined any offers to engage in programs of coexistence that were sponsored by the Jerusalem municipality and various governmental ministries, and even Israeli Jewish interfaith and peace organizations, to propagate the myth of reunification of Jerusalem. Despite the efforts to oppose normalizing the occupation through encounters, this agenda seeped into Jerusalem and even the West Bank after Oslo in 1993. Jerusalem became a safe place for bringing Israelis and Palestinians together between 1994 and 2000. However, such attempts ceased after the Second Intifada in 2000, which marked the collapse of the peace process and the illusion that Jerusalem was unified.

Before the First Intifada, we experienced the absurdity of the situation by living in East Jerusalem and working in West Jerusalem. Our afternoons and weekend activities were shaped by the solidarity campaigns to resist the Israeli Occupation in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. During the Palestinian Intifada, we organized and participated in campaigns to visit the refugee camps in the area of Bethlehem and Ramallah and took along Israelis to see for themselves the consequences of the occupation on the lives of Palestinians. Hoping that such visits would raise higher awareness among Israeli Jews, we witnessed the tears of some who visited and interacted for the first time with Palestinian refugees and members of the resistance movement. Transformed by these powerful encounters, some of these individuals became active in the Israeli peace movement and participated in the growing solidarity movement in late 1980s.

Jerusalem has always been a city of resilience and perseverance for us and many others. It was the centre for resistance against the Israeli occupation in the 1980s and 1990s through the nonviolent campaigns that characterized the Palestinian Intifada during 1987-1993. Activists like Mubarak Awad and Faisal Husseini in the Orient House contributed to the civic resistance movement before 1987. With others, they articulated ways for Jerusalemites to reject unification and engage in a peaceful liberation movement. Our experience with these circles provided us with an inner perspective on the challenges and difficulties facing every Palestinian who dares to raise his or her voice against the Israeli municipality or

security forces. However, in addition to formal and informal resistance in Jerusalem, other forces were at play. For the sake of gaining economic benefits or influence, these individuals collaborated with the Israeli security forces and municipal authority. Such figures served the interest and agenda of reunification by placing themselves as agents for spreading the Israeli government's propaganda. Although this was a small force, it symbolized an internal Palestinian divide that affected our lives and made it more challenging to project a completely united public front in rejecting reunification and shaping many of the social gatherings.

Today, thirty years since we left Jerusalem, it remains for us a symbol of the possibilities for Arab-Jewish conflict and peace. Israeli, Jewish, Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim leaders around the globe have manipulated the status of Jerusalem to justify certain religious, national, and political ideologies. One of the most deadly events was the visit of Ariel Sharon, the Israeli right-wing leader, to the Old City, with over 400 security forces, in October 2000. He came to the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-Sakhrah*) in Jerusalem to protest the possible political settlement that was being negotiated in Camp David between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak. The provocation resulted in the deaths and injuries of hundreds of Palestinians and sparked the Second Intifada. Unfortunately, Jerusalem continues to be exploited by such leaders today to mobilize political support. The most recent example is Donald J. Trump with his administration moving the American Embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem and recognizing the Israeli government's

claim for a unified Jerusalem, without any consideration of the Palestinian plight and rights to the city.

We visit Jerusalem almost once a year and connect with our old spots, such as making a stop at Houmos Leena for lunch and topping it off with delicious Kanafeh (thin noodle-like pastry or fine semolina dough, layered with white cheese and soaked in sweet, sugar-based syrup) from Jaffar for dessert. Every time we go through this ritual, we notice change in the old market and more and more shops closing and more and more Israeli flags on house roofs. The city is overtaken by one faith and one national group's discourse. There is less and less room for others. For us, the walk from the Mount of Olives to the Old City to buy Kaek (sesame bread, Simit) and watch old movies, set up on screens in tents where cold watermelon was served late at night in the 1980s, is not possible nowadays. The neighborhoods along this path were taken; narrow streets and alleys were replaced with wide streets; and our tents were replaced with train stations in a project that was intended to split off the Old City and make it more accessible to the western part of the city. We slowly saw how the city was transformed from a centre of culture and music (we were living in Jerusalem when the El-Hakawati Theatre [the Palestinian National Theatre] and the Sabreen music band were established) to a sad centre of defeat for the idea that Jerusalem belongs to all. We also witnessed, as we went back and forth, the transformation of Ramallah as the new centre of happenings and cultural and intellectual life, replacing Jerusalem and isolating people even more.

Eventually, the Jerusalem question will have to bring justice to all groups and faiths, but the cost of getting there has been expensive in terms of pain and human lives. Unfortunately, fewer leaders utilize the unique features of Jerusalem to call for genuine and just peace for both Israeli and Palestinian alike. However, there are some peace activists who remain faithful to the cause of peacemaking and peacebuilding, and they continue to struggle to promote social and political justice for Jerusalemites. For us, these peace activists represent the current and the past meaning of Jerusalem and the last chance for hope for the city.

9.

A Jerusalemite, But With No Access to Jerusalem

Rana Hajjaj

Early Life and Forced Displacement

Raising a big family in the Mediterranean city of Sidon in South Lebanon was no easy task for my Palestinian parents, who had just survived the Gulf War of the early 1990s in Kuwait. That was the third time that my father had been displaced due to threats and acts of violence: once as a one-year-old by armed Zionist militia that created the State of Israel on his land in 1948 Palestine, once as a teenager to study abroad in Egypt because of fears due to the Lebanese Civil War, and once as a 44-year-old-man due to threats from the Gulf War of the early 1990s in Kuwait.

For my parents and me, the only option to see Jerusalem and the holy sites was from our outdated, little, black-and-white television screen in old, historic Sidon. I had wondered at the complexity of calling a place home and not being able to access it physically. I stumbled at the stigma associated with the label "refugees," even when it was not my generation that had fled Palestine in the Nakba of 1948. The first wave of displacement

affected the livelihoods of my paternal grandparents, peaceful farmers in their early twenties, and my then-one-year-old father, who fled the northern mountain village, a district of Safad—Alma—because of a direct attack on their home. My family did not own firearms; as civilians with a little baby, the options were either to get killed or to flee for their lives. Luckily, my maternal grandparents were Jerusalemites from Beit Hanina and were not displaced in 1948. I am a descendant of four Palestinian grandparents, two of whom led a refugee life full of struggles, and two of whom were proud Jerusalemites who eventually moved out due to threats of the occupation of Jerusalem. The highest impact that displacement to Lebanon had on my paternal grandparents was the fact that they were bound now to a tiny apartment in a crowded, poverty-stricken area, whereas back in Alma, they had led a busy, dignified life full of freedom and independence. My grandmother made her own dairy products, baked her own bread, brought her own fresh water from the source, drank milk from cows she cared for, ate her own fruits, vegetables, and meat, and even distributed to the neighbors when in excess. She was an owner of a large area of rich and self-sustaining farmland.

My family did not flee alone. The Nakba, an Arabic word that literally translates into "The Catastrophe," is the day that armed settler militia violence became so unbearable that it drove the mass displacement of an estimated 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland. The land of historic Palestine had over 95 percent Palestinian occupancy under the British Mandate. The occupied lands of forcibly displaced Palestinians became what is currently known as the State of Israel.

Although uprooted from my homeland, I felt safe for the most part in Sidon, South Lebanon, except for times of Israeli air strikes and incursions across the border to occupy more areas, including rivers and farmland which were not captured at the end of the military occupation of Lebanon in 1982. From the memory of little me, the most notable dates of these outright acts of war were the years 1993, 1996, and 2006. These dates made their mark on my elementary and high school years. That general sense of safety was actually a privilege due to my mother's ability to save and invest in safe housing in the city. Fifteen minutes away, there were my paternal grandmother and extended family living in the notorious Ein al-Hilweh refugee camp, which is a 1.5 square kilometer area housing 80,000 people. I have visited several camps and United Nations Refugee and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools all over Lebanon from the Northern Nahr Al Bared camp to the Southern Al-Rashidieh camp. I have witnessed firsthand how vulnerable, food-insecure, and dependent for education and health the community was on UNRWA services. UNRWA offered a lifeline and is still widely seen as a providing government-like institution for the refugees, taking over for the stolen state, Palestine, for an estimated five million refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine. As I walked through camps, I witnessed tremendous need and poverty, but also great-spirited, simple, humble, selfless, and family-oriented people, with modest means but with strong connection to their culture, heritage, and homeland. It was humbling to see people who, after losing everything, could

still lead a difficult refugee life with faith, resilience, and hope. Many families kept keys to their homes and maintained large framed pictures of Jerusalem, and particularly Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock to show their resilience and strong spiritual connections to their capital city.

The arts from refugee camps have influenced my upbringing; I was particularly inspired by the artist Naji Salim al-Ali, a fellow 1948 Palestinian refugee from Ein al-Hilweh camp. His famous caricature, Handala, was the outcome of his Nakba sufferings and his life as a refugee boy. The camp initially began with tents, due to the belief that Palestinians who fled the violence would be allowed to return to their homes. Eventually, it turned into high rise buildings as Israel continuously denied the right to return, against United Nations (UN) Resolution 194, international refugee law, and international human rights law, which all emphasized the right to return. UN Resolution 194 speaks specifically to the right to return for all refugees; it even acknowledges the right to compensation for those refugees who do not wish to return.

Handala had become a remarkable symbol for the plight and resilience of the Palestinian people, wherever located in the Diaspora. Handala's hair had spiked from witnessing injustice and mass displacement as a child, as well as military occupation, illegal colonial settlements, stories of families split due to militarized zones, checkpoints, and restrictions on movement and freedom of religion.

My connection to Handala was deepened due to lack of access to civil rights in Lebanon, as well as constant denials of my right to return to my place of origin in Palestine. At the time, I thought that I could frame my identity, but I soon realized that that was not possible; symptoms of a wider issue started to surface and expose struggles with identity and sense of belonging. As I grew up and moved around from Kuwait to Lebanon and then eventually to New York, I began to unpack the truth about the situation. I had to accept that my identity could not be defined by one standard, logical parameter, or any widely accepted label; and that wherever I traveled, whether to live, to tour, to engage in business or leisure, I would be perceived as a tourist.

Adolescence and Displacement

My initial experiences with Palestinians were positive, being born to two well-educated and accomplished teachers. My father contributed to system-wide education reform in Kuwait, authoring books and developing curricula that introduced

computing to the entire school system in the 1980s. He was a self-made, independent, and intelligent man who empowered his daughters. My mother, a proud Jerusalemite from Beit Hanina and an English teacher, taught me the language at a young age, and she is a beacon of resilience and patience.

As motivated as I was with their encouragement, it was still difficult to navigate the world around me. The first eye-opening lesson was that there's no way to avoid being banned from joining the Lebanese professional basketball team. Here's a sample high school conversation with my father about taking my passion to the next level:

- ME EXCITED: "Baba, a pro basketball coach invited me to play with his national women's team!"
- Father: "Great!"
- Me: "He asked me to use my first name, but he suggested I play under another family name (for reporting purposes)."
- Father: "No, there can come a time when you'd regret this."

I did not pursue it, but I continued playing as the point guard for my school team. The team was asked to travel to Amman, Jordan, for a regional tournament, where it would represent Lebanon. All my Lebanese teammates participated without visa issues, except for me. My visa process proved impossible, which was confusing for a teenager. It was the very first indication that my identity, as I understand it, did not seem to exist for the world around me. I had a hand-written travel document issued by the Lebanese Republic, which claimed

that I was a descendant of a Palestinian refugee from 1948. The document was not issued by the Palestinian Authority, and therefore there was no real validation attesting to my identity.

It is no coincidence that the Palestinian Authority cannot provide Palestinians abroad with an identity card. This design has deliberately been set up by Israel, conveniently so that the ones who fled in 1948 and 1967 would never manage to fulfill their right to return. At the time, I did not have the capacity to understand the Oslo Peace Accords and all the peace negotiations, and was left deeply shattered over not being able to join my team.

What made it more infuriating was the fact that I had many relatives in Jordan and therefore a short visit was justified. It was really my identity, or the lack thereof, that overshadowed the process.

After that incident, I was able to establish myself so that I could visit Amman for both personal and business purposes. Every time I was provided a visa, there had to be collateral in cash or its equivalent for US $7,500. On one of those trips, I happened to be traveling with my mother when an intelligence officer singled me out, took my document, and ushered me to a separate room for questioning. My mother totally freaked out when she could no longer see me, and I heard her demanding from a bunch of officers, "Where did you take my daughter?" The officers, confused at how to calm her down, brought her into the investigation room, asked her if I were her daughter, and just let us go.

A year later, the basketball tournament was to take place in Cairo, Egypt. I was relieved to get a visa, but the experiences of being singled out in airports for additional processing and so-called security measures have continued as I traveled the world on that hand-written travel document. Among the hard-to-forget memories is being fingerprinted in the French, Hungarian, and American embassies, to name a few. I also recall thinking: If I were a criminal, I would likely not wish to enter an embassy that is closed to the public and looks like a fortress with a fleet of security personnel in sight.

The Past and Early Learning

It was my 6th grade history book that broke the news to me. The lesson was about the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and its repercussions. I do not remember most of my elementary classes, but I certainly remember the chill going down my spine as the teacher explained. It was then that I realized that there was a strategic plan in place before 1948. In that same year, world leaders—representatives of member states at the United Nations—authorized the establishment of the State of Israel on Palestine's land, after the British Mandate over Palestine ended.

For those who may not be familiar with the declaration, I quote here the letter of Arthur James Balfour, Britain's Foreign Secretary:

Foreign Office

November 2nd, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

> "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood *that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.*"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour

[Emphasis added]

Social Justice and Adulthood

In Beirut, I recall being banned from working but then getting job interviews and negotiating my way to a work permit once I was selected for the job. I recall working for the International Red Cross Middle East North Africa regional office in Beirut and paying my fair share of taxes to the National Society Security Fund but then being banned from reaping the benefits associated with the contribution. I also recall that when my father passed, I was banned from inheriting the house and registering it in my or a sibling's name. I can recall many instances when I have been in places and done things in spite of the world around me, and in defiance of all barriers in place, whether legislated barriers or cultural ones.

In hindsight, the social, economic, political, and all kinds of exclusions that refugees face worldwide are one reason that member states of the United Nations should do a better job at conflict prevention. History has shown that no country, no matter how developed and inclusive it claims to be, can accept an overwhelming influx of refugees without major political and social consequences, including the rise of populism and xenophobia.

It would be a wise strategy for member states of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to focus on Security Council reform and, most importantly, conflict prevention. Reform would hopefully help address the protection of occupied East Jerusalem from annexation, as well as restrict excessive veto-power usage for member states that use it to shelter those who commit violations of international law.

Identity and Adulthood

Well into adulthood, identity issues kept troubling me. As I considered applying for jobs at United Nations (UN) specialized agencies in Lebanon, such as UNIFIL, and to the UN's Young Professionals Program (YPP) in New York, I was never able to find a country in the drop-down menu that describes or fits my identity. I recall being puzzled, confused, and unsure how to proceed. There is not a 1948 Palestinian refugee handbook. Eventually, I had grown into being aware of this dilemma, but it was still as annoying as the first time I looked and could not find it in an international job search. The nationality matters at the UN because the UN takes geographical, nationality, gender, racial, and other factors into account as part of finalizing the selection process. It is an effort that is supposed to create a healthy balance in the workplace. Not being able to outline clearly who you are from the get-go was not particularly helpful.

When I finally called Human Resources to see if I would meet the requirements to apply—which included being from certain countries on the list—the HR person was stunned by my response when she asked me, "Where are you from?" When I finished the whole Kuwait-Lebanon-New York Palestinian story, she had an unexpected outburst of laughter after which she apologized and said, "I'm so sorry! I'm Austrian and just could have never seen that coming." After a few weeks of deliberations with the legal department, she came back with the definitive negative that I would not meet the requirements

of the YPP. Her advice was that if I am serious about a career at the UN, I should consider selecting "stateless" from the drop-down menu.

I was in denial for a while over whether that was true. My whole family is Palestinian, and all of those five million refugees registered at UNRWA identify as Palestinian. The Oslo Accords did not address the refugee issue, which gave way to the "stateless" label.

Statelessness and the Oslo Peace Accords

The Oslo Peace Accords played a significant role in the label I was given as "stateless." It was the first time that the Palestinian Authority had acknowledged the State of Israel and agreed to legitimize the occupation of 78 percent of historic Palestine's land (as documented in the British Mandate's records). The Accords agreed to discount nineteen years of occupation from 1948 to 1967 and to wipe out the 1948 refugees' rights from the negotiations table. The negotiations were secretly held in Oslo, and the Accords served some political interests at the time, such as allowing Yasser Arafat, the former President, back into Palestine after he was expelled for resisting the occupation. The Accords appointed the PA as a representative of the Palestinian people until the creation of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The geographic landscape of the remaining 22 percent of the land—which was designated by the Oslo Accords for the Palestinians—is segregated, confusing, and illogical.

The Gaza Strip and the West Bank have no connection such as a bridge or a train. The future Palestinian State, including East Jerusalem, would have no control over borders, airports, currency, economy, sovereignty; that is, most things that constitute a state are lacking here. It would have no sense of community or interconnectedness.

Palestine and Women

At the UN's annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which brings together women from all over the world to discuss the latest developments affecting women, I have learned much about Palestinian women, civil society, and women leaders. During my journey, I met two impressive Palestinian leaders: Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, PLO Executive Committee member, and Ms. Feda Abdelhady-Nasser, Deputy Permanent Observer of Palestine to the UN. Both women have such great qualities and vision that one would wish they would be more empowered instead of hitting the glass ceiling associated with strong and competent women. They are both in leadership positions and are influential and widely respected in their circles, but do not have the broad authority to shape political discourse, unlike the men in male-dominated Ministerial-level positions.

I had the privilege of working with Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser after I approached her with a social entrepreneurship education program targeting student refugees from Ein El Hilweh camp. It was a bridge program to allow access to quality higher

education institutions such as the American University of Beirut. She was a positive, uplifting leader who helped me with outreach, and we, together, were able to carry the vision through the resource mobilization and implementation phases. I am grateful for her leadership and the opportunity to give back to my community.

The following year at the UN CSW in 2018, I watched the film "Naila and the Uprising," which told the story of Naila, one of the women leaders of the Intifada, which is the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. She could see Israel economically hurting and ready to negotiate. And then, by contrast, numerous concessions were made by the then-exiled President Arafat during his secret negotiations in Norway with the Israeli Prime Minister.

This very secret negotiation is what led to the Oslo Peace Accords, which had deprived me of the right to exist as a person with an identity that is not stateless. Similar engagements at the UN deepened my belief that the world is telling me that I do not have the right to exist. Yet, the irony of it all is that I proudly exist and have attended high-level events at the UN full of smart diplomats and world leaders.

On the 70th anniversary of Al-Nakba, in May 2018, there was a two-day panel featuring experts from all over the world to discuss the ongoing conflict. One expert particularly stood out for me as she unwrapped her lifelong research on protracted crises. She advocated for a one-state solution with an extensive four-step reparation process. Her proposed structure would target the inclusion of all people in the areas

of democratic legislative institutions, economics, politics, elections, education, public services, and access to basic and civil rights.

In Jerusalem In-person, and the Prospect of Peace

It took me three decades to arrange to see Jerusalem in-person; Jerusalem symbolizes an inaccessible, highly contested but holy city, with a signature wall, many checkpoints, and restrictions on movement to ensure that access is denied for Palestinians who are not Jerusalemites. East Jerusalem is supposed to be the capital of the future Palestinian State under the Oslo Accords. I was fortunate to travel to Jerusalem in August 2019. When I asked one of my colleagues, who is from Hebron, to meet me one afternoon in Jerusalem, he quickly labeled the idea as the unthinkable: "It'll take me months to get a single-entry permit, if any." This colleague in particular is one of the smartest people I know. He has registered patents, and he invented an app for early detection of breast cancer. He's in no way a threat, but that is just an example of life under what resembles an apartheid system, which imposes restrictions on movement based on who you are.

It was only when I visited Jerusalem that I really got the privilege of understanding the gravity of living in the shadows of a conflict for three decades. As I landed at Ben-Gurion Airport and the taxi drove toward Jerusalem, I witnessed a systematic attempt to suppress a particular people, similar to descriptions of South Africa in textbooks. It is inexplicable that

just ten minutes in, you realize that the State had built barbed wires and electric fences on both sides of major highways. I noted that the highway was exclusively designated for cars that display an Israeli license plate. Palestinians living on both sides of the road—whose livelihoods were threatened by the construction of the highway—had to create their own solution: an underground tunnel to pick up some of the shattered pieces of the sense of community.

As I walked the streets from West to East Jerusalem, one particularly distinctive service made it clear on which side you were. You did not have to stare at people or to listen to whether they were speaking Hebrew or Arabic. All you needed was a mindful look at the workings of the garbage collection service. In the West, streets are spotless, cleaned every day, and the city government works around the clock with the upkeep. Walk eastward for five minutes, and then you see overfilled dumpsters around which people started leaving garbage. One of these dumpsters was next to a public park, and I remember thinking that these innocent Palestinian children, whose only goal in life is play, are playing near a health hazard. The kids deserve to play in a clean and safe environment; cleaning one street perfectly well and then cleaning the parallel street once every three weeks looks and smells like apartheid.

Freedom of religion to access and to pray in Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, the third-most-important holy site for Muslims worldwide, has been often restricted under so-called security concerns. It is noteworthy to mention that the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem is an unarmed civilian

population living under occupation, to this date. Despite what mainstream media try to depict about Palestinians being "troublemakers," it is just not true.

I encourage those who have not yet encountered a Palestinian to read about the people and culture. Mainstream media coverage has consistently favored the State's side of the story, assuming that Palestinian stories like mine are an unimportant narrative representing ghosts who are not supposed to exist. I watch Emmy-award winning journalism on U.S. channels but find it lacking a basic understanding of the history of the region, critical in-depth analysis, objectivity, and the other's perspective. The media fail to portray the truth about Palestinian culture, which emphasizes family, kindness, healthy cooking, and, most importantly, education and calls for lasting peace and justice.

The Palestinians have consistently favored peace as evident in the Palestinian Authority's abiding by the Oslo Peace Accords and holding on to protecting Israel's security in exchange for the so-called two-state solution that ought to have materialized within five years of signature of the Oslo Accords. The promised Palestinian state was supposed to comprise occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. To this date, the world witnesses that Palestine is not a state, and that Israel keeps expanding its occupation, annexation, and settlement-building activities beyond the land that it occupied on 78 percent of historic Palestine's land. At the moment, the two-state solution is not viable anymore.

According to the Oslo Accords, the occupation started in 1967. But according to my grandparents, who fled because of the violence in 1948, the occupation started the moment their land was stolen in 1948. Twisting the narratives in a peace negotiation does not sustain peace. A sustainable peace agreement requires justice and the courage to address and compensate for injustice.

The Future

It would be a noble, statesman-like, and visionary moment if the Palestinian Authority would reverse course by ending its paralyzed inaction in regard to the so-called "Deal of the Century," or the "Trump Middle East Peace Plan," which authorizes Israel to annex the West Bank and ends the Palestinian claim to Jerusalem. True leadership would walk away from the Oslo Accords and would halt all forms of security cooperation. That also means that the Palestinian Authority dissolves itself and allows Palestinians a shot at democracy, inclusion, and the right to self-determination.

In an upcoming election, it is worth electing a competent and principled representative who would negotiate on behalf of the fact that the price of security cooperation is not just the salaries of the security personnel. The real price of security cooperation must include justice for those who got pushed out as Israel created itself on their land. A peace negotiation should not aim to re-write history or somehow erase parts of history (as the Oslo Accords did), but should acknowledge

and address history to pave the way for a real reconciliation process, and then move on.

The road to true Palestinian wellbeing is real inclusion of all Palestinians, including those in the Diaspora. Ineffectual leadership is no longer acceptable as Palestinians face the major threat of losing Jerusalem due to annexation. Competence can lead us through difficult times, and it also unleashes outside-the-box solutions to a seven-decade-long conflict. It includes letting some of the old ways die, such as the requirement for absolute party loyalty as a prerequisite for attaining a leadership position. This toxic culture is prevalent not just inside Palestine; I have seen it in institutions that serve Palestinians outside Palestine.

Politicizing institutions and maintaining one-party rule is dangerous. Although it allows a short-sighted, short-term gain for the party currently in power and gives a deceptive illusion of control, the long-term consequences are a widespread indifference to corruption and weakened institutions that have no shot at independence, self-determination, or effective leadership in a future Palestinian State.

Other than a democratically-elected competent leader, the PA needs to set up a structure that addresses the aspirations of all Palestinians, including the Diaspora. Such a structure requires all-inclusive consultation processes and ensures the competence and capacity of leadership. The PA is unable to meet those aspirations without long-term strategic partnerships with organizations and qualified individuals in the U.S., UK, and other world powers. It would be wise to

look at the strategies that have enabled the Israelis to impose with impunity a regime that resembles apartheid. What started with militias and small settlements over the decades prior to 1948 had become an established state that the whole world recognized—on someone else's land—through violence, mass displacement, and the ability to rally behind one Zionist movement and mobilize resources for it. I would advocate that the PA learn that there is no way forward without planting the seeds for a similar model of organizing and lobbying world powers and conducting mass media campaigns to raise awareness about the Palestinian cause.

It is time to reckon that long speeches at the UN's General Assembly in which Palestinians beg for the international community to solve our problems do not produce results. Day-dreaming about the long-dead Two-State Solution does not produce results. Some of the aspirations of Palestinian youth can be fulfilled by creating a culture of inclusivity (among various political factions, genders, and ethnic minorities), lobbying, and long-term strategic partnerships with the Diaspora, and, most importantly, putting strong and competent women front and center in all positions of power, including the positions of President, Prime Minister, and government ministers.

It is time, Palestinians, to take matters into your own hands before the cause is completely lost, as is expected to happen when Israel continues with its ever-expanding Annexation Plan. No state—no matter how sympathetic—will do the work on your behalf. Many people in the world have not even heard of the Palestinian cause. Even those who did hear have

become fatigued over the past seven decades, including the Arab countries, which generally try hard to appear to strike a friendlier tone.

10.

Arab American in the Heart of the Holy Land

Lana Shehadeh

Growing up in a predominantly white middle-class city, for a Palestinian Muslim female, was always an extremely confusing ordeal. I spent hours explaining to students in my class why, during the month of Ramadan, Muslims chose to fast from sunrise to sunset or why my mother chose to cover her hair with a hijab. No amount of in-depth explanation around the rationale behind religiosity or modesty would suffice. My parents consistently explained that, although we felt very different from the environment around us, living in the United States gave our family the opportunity my parents had not been allotted while at home in Palestine. My dad came to the U.S. as a teenager to help support his family as one of the older brothers in the household. He ultimately married my mother and settled in Parkland, Florida, after spending the first few years in New York. As immigrants, they understood that living the American dream meant giving their children the best of both worlds.

In summer 1994, all that would change. After the signing of the Oslo peace accords, my parents' discourse changed

drastically. My father talked about the hope for a Palestinian homeland and the development of a state in what is known as the occupied Palestinian territories. Yitzhak Rabin, then Israeli Prime Minister, and Yasser Arafat, then head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, along with their teams met with their American counterparts and signed what was called the Oslo Accords in September 1993. The Oslo Accords marked the start of the Oslo peace process and aimed at achieving a peace treaty based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The talks began as secret negotiations between the Israelis and the PLO. The Accords quickly acknowledged the PLO as the partner in negotiations with Israel and the creation of a Palestinian Authority that would govern semi-autonomously. Most importantly, however, the Accords aimed at dictating the borders of Israel and Palestine; yet it failed to recognize a completely independent Palestinian state.[13]

For many Palestinians, the Oslo Accords were a promise for a new beginning. My parents were no different. My parents, along with many other Palestinian ex-pats, moved back to the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the hope of introducing their children to their culture, language, and roots. The West Bank witnessed an influx of Palestinians coming from North America and Western Europe. In fact, an influx of around two hundred thousand Palestinians returned with the hope of building a nation. Many came in for professional purposes and were recruited quickly by companies as well as the Palestinian

13 Nathan J. Brown, *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

Authority. They had a strong influence on the building of the Palestinian territories in the late nineties and the first decade of the current century.[14]

My family also decided to move back. In June 1995, we arrived at Al-Lidd or Lod Airport, which Israelis call "Ben Gurion" Airport, located on the northern outskirts of the city of Lod, which is 12 miles from Tel-Aviv and 28 miles from Jerusalem.[15] A cousin of my father's was waiting for us. Excited to see us all, he greeted us with "Falasteen Eshtakatilkum (Palestine has missed you)." I did not understand what he said at the time as I could barely speak Arabic, but the excitement in his eyes and his love for his land were edifying. We drove through the roads of Tel Aviv, and he explained the difference between Israel proper and the lands of the West Bank, the areas Palestinians were allowed in and the areas restricted to residents of Israel alone. The car finally stopped in Silwad, a town just northeast of Ramallah where the Palestinian Authority has its headquarters.[16] Unfortunately, Silwad is currently split, based on the Oslo II framework, with 1.7 percent of its land in Area A, 37.7 percent in Area B, and 60.6 percent in Area C. (Area A enjoys full civil and security control by the Palestinian Authority; Area B has Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control; and

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14 Xavier Guignard, "The Emergence of Palestinian Mughtaribûn: Diaspora Politics and State-Building in Oslo Palestine." *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies* 3, 2 (2016): 130-156.

15 Elliott Weiss, "Establishing Roots at Israel's Ben Gurion Airport Garden: Landscapes of National Identity." *National Identities* 12, 2 (2010): 199-210.

16 Salem Thawaba, *The Integration of GIS into School Mapping: A Case of Ramallah City, Palestine*, 2016.

Area C is under full Israeli civil and security control.)[17] Most of my grandfather's land is located in Area C; this situation prohibits my family from cultivating that land or developing infrastructure or changes that did not exist prior to the signing of the accords. Although this may seem like a normal legislation, it prohibits a large number of people living in Silwad and the neighboring West Bank villages from developing, cultivating, and establishing any infrastructure on their land. This is the case since a significant amount of land in the West Bank has been zoned to Area C.

My grandmother stood outside crying hysterically. She could not believe how big we had all gotten. Many of us, regrettably, could not communicate with her in Arabic. I could not communicate with her at all. All I managed to offer was a measly smirk. She took us inside and showed us the meal she had prepared. She had made mansaf, a famous traditional Palestinian dairy-based dish with lamb meat, which is usually served with bulgur or rice. She explained the next morning that she had secured a taxi that would take us to Jerusalem to visit the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhrah in Arabic) and Al-Aqsa Mosque (the Farthest Mosque). As an eight-year-old, this was all foreign to me, but I went along with it. We woke up before dawn to make sure we made it in time for the noon prayer.

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17 Petter Næss, Per Gunnar Røe, Synnøve Larsen, "Travelling distances, modal split and transportation energy in thirty residential areas in Oslo." *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 38, 3 (1995): 349-370.

Although Jerusalem is less than twenty-two miles from Silwad, we, Palestinians, needed to pass through an Israeli military checkpoint called Kalandia or Qalandiya, which takes its name from the Palestinian village where it is situated. There we stood in a lengthy line of tired and angry men and women waiting to enter the outskirts of Jerusalem. These were people who needed to enter Israel for work or medical reasons, or to visit the Holy City, like us, and pray there. The wait felt like forever. I was hot and hungry. It was finally our turn. We approached the glass window, and an annoyed, incredibly young Israeli soldier looked at me, then at my passport, and said: "Yallah, roohy (come on, just go through)." That was it. This very young, probably eighteen-year-old, teenager decided whether I could enter or not. I tried to brush it off and explore this new city.

We took another taxi to enter Jerusalem. We passed old homes and then a huge Israeli settlement that was built with stunning white stones and with an exceptionally clean modern look to it. Before we knew it, we were there. The taxi stopped and everyone got out in front of the great Damascus Gate. There were merchants selling "ka'ak," a sesame-covered bread shaped like a long oval. They hand you a small piece of newspaper with za'atar (mainly made of thyme, dried sumac, salt, and toasted sesame seeds) in it to drizzle on the dry bread. My dad purchased one for me with a cold Sprite and sat me down on the large steps facing the gate.

As we sat eating our modest meal, my dad began to reminisce about his own experiences in the Old City. He explained that

when he was a teenager, he had open access to Jerusalem. In fact, his parents had left their own hometown of Silwad to work in Haifa, a city within the Green Line (that is, the 1949 Armistice border or the pre-June 5, 1967, border). His parents owned a fish shop in Haifa, yet after the Six-Day War, they returned to their hometown of Silwad and their lives changed forever. I looked at my dad trying to understand where all his emotions came from, why they all loved this city so much. What was it all about?

My father guided us to enter the Damascus Gate and see the market inside the Old City. People shouted and invited us to their shops. I heard lots of laughter, and generous cups of Turkish coffee were offered. We finally arrived at the Zalatimo sweets shop. It was a very small and old shop that still used a brick oven to bake cheese-stuffed pastries with drizzled hot syrup. We sat and listened to the man who prepared these delights. He explained his own experience in Jerusalem, where he had grown up, and the shop where he has worked since as early as he can remember as his grandfather owned it, then his father, and now he did. My father was the de facto translator. I asked him to ask the man what Jerusalem meant to him and why he decided to stay for so long. He looked at us all with a warm smile and said, "To some, Jerusalem means nothing, but to me it is everything. I cannot bear to leave it." I still remember that feeling. That was fifteen years ago....

Jerusalem's value does not come from its rich resources or intrinsic worth; rather, its historic significance. Jerusalem is regarded as a classic divided city, contested by two peoples, with historic value in multiple religions and ethnicities.

Division of the city is rooted in the 1948-1967 era, when an international border between Israel and Jordan ran through the midst of the city. The Western part was given to Israel and considered the Israeli side of the city, while the Eastern area of the city was considered Palestinian and, thus, administered by the Jordanian government at the time with UN supervision of the border. This changed with the June 1967 War as Israel began altering the character of East Jerusalem soon after capturing it. Today, over fifty years later, the large Palestinian majority in the Eastern side of the city remains opposed to any form of unification under Israeli rule deeming it a stateless land with people carrying stateless IDs.[18]

As I look back at my time in the Palestinian territories and my frequent visits to Jerusalem's Old City, I reminisce about the beautiful stone walls, the fresh scent of sesame bread, the organic fresh-squeezed orange juice, and the walk to the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque. For many, Jerusalem is a touristy site where people visit for religious and historical reasons. For me, as a Palestinian American, Jerusalem is a city that has completely transformed my view of the world, which, after seeing Jerusalem, seems odd to me. Jerusalem is a place where lots of injustice exists, where people can be trapped in a small crowded city and still feel isolated and unable to find agency in their surroundings. It is a place that in certain secular perspectives may be worth nothing, while to others, with deep spiritual conviction and historical consciousness, it is worth everything.

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18 Wendy Pullan, "The Space of Contested Jerusalem." *Jerusalem Quarterly 39* (2009): 39-50.

11.

A Palestinian-American Perspective on the Holy City of Jerusalem

Mohamed K. Ghumrawi

Jerusalem is considered one of the most religiously important cities in the world. It is a city of peace, love, tranquility, and historical significance. Conversely, it is also a city that has been riddled with violence, bloodshed, and war for centuries. Nonetheless, one's view of Jerusalem is influenced by the perspective in which it is viewed. In this essay, I reflect on my personal perspective on Jerusalem and how central it is not only to me, but also to young Palestinian Americans and Muslims around the world.

As an American born citizen with Palestinian roots (my grandparents along with the childhood version of my mother left Palestine in 1967), Palestine in general and Jerusalem specifically have always been a focal point in my household. As you enter our home, you are greeted with photos on the wall of Palestinian women dressed in *thobes* (traditional Palestinian women's clothing) and a large portrait of the Dome of the Rock hanging on the wall in the living room. This setting is all too familiar in many Palestinian homes in the

United States. However, what is less recognizable is how this connection to Palestine and Jerusalem develops and matures within individuals over time or how the city is intimately interconnected with Palestinian-American identity.

A Brief History of Jerusalem

Since the days of the earliest prophets, the city of Jerusalem has been and remains a holy city for all three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Although all three share the same basic foundational principles—the belief in one God -- each one has its own religious, historical, and personal attachment to Jerusalem.[19] It is the city where the Jewish Temple once stood and was destroyed twice, the location where Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected, and the location where Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascension took place. Jerusalem houses many holy sites, including the Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. With so many important religious references, it is no wonder the history of Jerusalem is both one of splendor and magnificence, but also of violence and war, of bloodshed and pain.

In 722 BCE, the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Ancient Israel. The Assyrians had a policy of deporting locals who lived in a land that they conquered. They moved the Israelites out and replaced them with Assyrian

19 For a detailed account of the history of Jerusalem and the three monotheistic religions, see Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (New York: Random House Inc., 2005).

settlers as well as members of other ethnic groups—all of them polytheists. It was not until 586 BCE that the Assyrians fell to the Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Southern Kingdom, including the city of Jerusalem. He destroyed the first Jewish Temple and exiled the Jews from Jerusalem. Soon after, the Persians conquered the Babylonians and, in 538 BCE, Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return to Palestine. The Jews would rebuild the Second Temple in 515 BCE, and it would remain until 70 CE, at which time it would be destroyed by the Romans. The Romans then exiled the Jews once again from living in Jerusalem. This was the response from the Romans after the First and Second Revolts (66-73 CE and 132-135 CE, respectively).

In the midst of this history, we have the time of Jesus, whose early followers were also persecuted. It was not until 312 CE when Emperor Constantine took power that he converted to Christianity, becoming the first Christian ruler of the Roman Empire. He ended the persecution of Christianity in the empire; however, while Constantine proclaimed himself Christian, he did not make Christianity the official religion of the empire. Additionally, church architecture and many of the earliest churches in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas go back to Emperor Constantine's reign.

Some time later, we have the introduction of Islam into the city. Prophet Muhammad was given the divine revelations of the Qur'an, or "The word of God," through the Archangel Gabriel. Muhammad received his first revelation in 610 CE, and these revelations would continue to be delivered to

him over a period of 22 years, culminating in a total of 114 *surahs* or chapters in the Qur'an. Before his death in 632 CE, Prophet Muhammad was able to unite the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula under the banner of Islam.

One of the most critical events in the Muslim tradition relating to the city of Jerusalem would be the Night Journey and Ascension into heaven by Prophet Muhammad, also known as *Lailat al-Miraj*. The story tells that the prophet traveled from Mecca to Jerusalem in a single night, where he would lead the previous prophets in prayer. He then ascended into heaven, where *Allah* (God) would instruct Muslims to pray five times a day.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad, the Muslim *Umma* (community) would initially be led by four *Rashidun* or "Rightly-Guided" caliphs: Abu Bakr (632-634 CE), 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (634-644 CE), 'Uthman (644-656 CE), and Ali (656-661 CE). The second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, would eventually conquer the city of Jerusalem putting it under Muslim rule. As the Muslim armies approached the walls of Jerusalem, Patriarch Sophronius organized the defense of the city with the help of the Byzantine garrison.[20] However, they were no match for the Muslim armies. Although there is some disagreement amongst scholars as to the exact date, between 637 and 638 CE, the Muslim armies conquered Jerusalem after a siege was laid to the city. "Tradition has it that the patriarch refused to deliver the Holy City to anybody but Caliph 'Umar".[21]

20 Ibid., 227-228.
21 Ibid., 228.

'Umar traveled from Damascus to Jerusalem for this momentous occasion and to accept the surrender of the city. According to Armstrong, 'Umar "expressed the monotheistic ideal of compassion more than any previous conqueror of Jerusalem, with the possible exception of King David. He presided over the most peaceful and bloodless conquest that the city had yet seen in its long and often tragic history. Once the city surrendered, there was no killing, no destruction of property, no burning of rival religious symbols, no expulsions or expropriations, and no attempt to force the inhabitants to embrace Islam".[22]

As one account details, it is said that as 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, "made his way to Jerusalem, the Jews asked for permission to live in the city. 'Umar gave these Jewish families their own area in Jerusalem, located in what is now the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. There, they were allowed to build a religious college and a synagogue to pray in the neighborhood of the Temple Mount, once the site of Solomon's Temple".[23] After centuries of being barred from living in Jerusalem, under Muslim rule Jews were once again allowed to return. Additionally, supported by Qur'anic injunctions, any non-Muslims living under Muslim rule, especially Jews and Christians (considered "People of the Book" in Islam), could not be persecuted, killed, expelled, or forced to convert to Islam. Although relations were not perfect, for the first time Muslims were able to establish a system in Jerusalem that allowed Jews, Christians, and Muslims to live together in relative peace.

22 Ibid.

23 Martin Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House: A History of Jews in Muslim Lands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

Reflecting on Jerusalem

For a Palestinian-American born in the diaspora, identity can sometimes be complicated. Words such as tragedy, exile, dispossession, and struggle, and conversely, words such as resistance, defiance, enduring, innovative, and prideful have become associated with Palestinian identity. Even as Palestinians live in places outside of Palestine, their identity and connection to the homeland continue in numerous ways. Speaking Arabic, having Palestinian or Arab friends, cooking Arabic food, images of Jerusalem or the Dome of the Rock in family living rooms, embroidered dresses or *thobes*, mother-of-pearl decorated Qur'ans and plates, Palestinian flags, dancing *dabka* and other national and cultural representations are common within Palestinian households. However, none of these embody as much a "connection to the homeland" for young Palestinian Americans like myself as does visiting Palestine (and Jerusalem) for the first time.[24]

The reason I have emphasized the history of Jerusalem is because one believes this history is critical to its future. Some may argue that this belief is idealistic, but I highlight the conflict, the persecution, and the eventual coexistence between faiths because I believe that these events are the

24 For a good overview of the Palestinian diaspora and the concept of "connection to the homeland," see Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (England: Psychology Press, 2003). For readings on Palestinian identity and the question of Palestine, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) and Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

embodiment of the true meaning of Jerusalem. The first time I walked through the Old City of Jerusalem, prayed at the Dome of the Rock, walked up to the Western Wall, and sat in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it became evident why this city is vital to the three major Abrahamic faiths. If it were not for religious identifiers such as hijabs, kippahs, and, crosses, one would not be able to tell a Muslim, a Jew, and a Christian apart. Jerusalem is the essence of interfaith existence. In it, all people move harmoniously in sync and work together to live and provide the religious experience of a lifetime to visiting tourists.

The Old City of Jerusalem is rich in history, culture, and religion. Walking through its pathways is an experience like no other. To tread where some of the world's main prophets once walked is indescribable. It was a humbling experience the first time I set eyes on the beautiful golden dome that lay at the center of the Al-Aqsa compound. I recall the last time I was in the Old City, as I bought souvenirs from local merchants and drank *qahwah* (coffee) while snacking on a piece of *kanafe* (traditional Middle Eastern dessert), I pondered how a city so central to the three monotheistic religions that preach peace at their core had caused so much conflict among the adherents of these religions. In fact, it is less a religious issue and more a political one. Israel's establishment in 1948 (and the resultant *Nakba* or catastrophe), as well as Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, constitute the genesis of the contemporary conflict within the city. Unfortunately, in modern times, Jerusalem has become a city infused with dirty politics and institutionalized systemic and systematic discrimination.

Moreover, as Palestinian Americans, we are sometimes afforded privileges over our Palestinian brothers and sisters living in Palestine. Being an American passport holder, I have the privilege of being able to travel to Jerusalem from the West Bank. However, many Palestinians living in the West Bank (including my own relatives living in El-Bireh and Ramallah) are not afforded that same privilege. They must obtain a permit from Israel to be able to travel into Jerusalem (permits that are rarely issued to Palestinians). While Israel claims Jerusalem is its "eternal and undivided" capital, the divisions are clear once you are in the city. West Jerusalem (mostly Jewish), has improved infrastructure and better schools, and receives a lot of monetary allocations from the Jerusalem Municipality or Israeli government. By contrast, East Jerusalem (mostly Arab), has a crumbling infrastructure and receives less funding, and building permits are rarely approved. Furthermore, Arabs in East Jerusalem are not allowed to vote in Israeli national elections even though their lives are influenced by the everyday decisions of politicians who win those elections. These unjust and discriminatory policies have transformed the city from one of potential harmony and peace to one of despair and political viciousness.

As world leaders make unilateral and ambiguous claims to Jerusalem, claiming who the city does and does not *belong* to, the true owners of Jerusalem have been and always will be the people. O how I long to see the day when Jerusalem returns to its true essence as a city of peace where Muslims, Christians, and Jews can worship freely, live together, and work together

under a government that administers the city with equality for all, regardless of background, ethnic make-up, or religion. The idea of making Jerusalem a city specific to a particular religious group is both disrespectful and unacceptable. Jerusalem will truly be free only when politicians realize that the city belongs to no single religious group while simultaneously belonging to all religious groups.

Religions were not created to incite hate, although they have become a tool used by some to pursue their own personal agendas. In this regard, we must highlight the examples in history where Judaism, Christianity, and Islam coexisted in a creative and mutually enriching manner in the region. Bearing this history in mind, one can only hope that the future of Jerusalem will be bolder and brighter, working to bring communities together rather than pitting them against one another. Only then can we build a more prosperous future for Jerusalem, returning the Holy City to its true essence of love, peace, and harmony.

12.

Jerusalem, You Will Be There

Dina Naji

"Where can I free myself of the homeland in my body?" —Mahmoud Darwish

Painting by Dina Naji

When I was asked to write about my feelings on Jerusalem, I was both honored and burdened! For a Palestinian who never

actually lived in Palestine, I have mixed emotions toward the Land of my father. Most of my life, I wanted so badly to be involved physically in spreading awareness, tolerance, and the truth. I wanted to be there not just in spirit, but also in body. But life has its own agenda and plan. Yes, I was never there in body, but spiritually I never left. I always had these buried thoughts that I never dared share. I love you, Palestine, but I wish I didn't!

As a Muslim Palestinian, I experience anger and sadness from all that happens to Jerusalem, from Islamophobia to apartheid and to land rape. Sometimes, it is overbearing. Other times, I want to turn my head away. But it is just impossible.

I think all Palestinians, whether they like it or not, were born with something different in their blood, their genes. We were born to carry a burden, a nostalgia, and a responsibility that we have to carry for the rest of our lives, no matter where we are in the world. It doesn't matter if we live two minutes away from the Al-Aqsa Mosque, or as far away as possible on a completely different continent; we will always have it...the homesickness. And it is painful.

Many people, when they hear the name Jerusalem, think of conflict, war, terror, anger.

But Jerusalem is much more than that to me. When all these holy sites across faiths are brought together in one place, it is inevitable to feel PEACE. It doesn't matter what you believe and what name you give God. In Jerusalem, we are all one. This is where we become human again. We remember that we were born the same, and we will die the same. Nobody is

superior, no religion or faith is superior. We all have similar fears, similar weaknesses, and similar sins. We all need to be saved. We all need to return to Him, for there is no other refuge but with Him.

It's this holy land that will one day reawaken our senses. One day. Some day. Perhaps not in our lifetime, but surely before this world comes to an end.

Obviously as a Muslim, Jerusalem has deep significance to me. Jerusalem is a sacred site in the Islamic tradition, as significant as Mecca and Al-Madina in Saudi Arabia.

The city of Jerusalem is not mentioned with this name in the Qur'an, but what is mentioned are the Holy Land and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Night Journey: The Qur'an talks about the Prophet's night journey to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The mosque is generally understood to mean the remains of the Second Temple, given the title *Bait ul Muqadas* (Holy House) in Hadith, derived from the Hebrew title *Beit HaMikdash*.

Muslims believe that many prophets were related to the city, and also believe that Prophet Muhammad visited the city on a night journey. It was also the first qiblah (direction of prayer) for Muslims, and Prophet Muhammad assigned the Al-Aqsa for pilgrimage.

> "Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (Qur'an 17:1).

A big part of Jerusalem's importance and holiness to Muslims comes from the city's strong connection to Abraham, David, Solomon, and Jesus. Their stories are found in the Qur'an. After the death of Sayyidna Muhammad, many of his close Companions actually resided in Jerusalem, and are buried there, including 'Ubadah bin As-Samit and Shadaad bin Aus.

> "... So turn your face toward al-Masjid al-Haram. And wherever you [believers] are, turn your faces toward it [in prayer]. Indeed, those who have been given the Scripture well know that it is the truth from their Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what they do. And if you brought to those who were given the Scripture every sign, they would not follow your qiblah. Nor will you be a follower of their qiblah. Nor would they be followers of one another's qiblah..." (Qur'an 2: 143-145).

But also, because of the Jewish and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, it is significant to Muslims since to be a true Muslim, one has to believe and respect all the prophets, books, and religions.

I am the daughter of an Egyptian mother and a Palestinian father. I was born and raised in Kuwait where I grew up knowing that I was Palestinian because in the Arab world you are what your father is. My one and only visit to Palestine was in 1984 when we took a family trip to our dad's homeland in a village outside of Bethlehem, called Al Khader.

Thirty-five years have passed and I still remember every detail, every scent, every feeling. I remember the huge olive tree in my grandfather's garden that would give us endless shade. I remember the donkeys and the smell of the olive oil. The green shades and tints of the trees and fruits are etched in my brain. Will I ever return again? Perhaps one day, but I truly never left.

I feel privileged to have Palestinian blood, and also privileged to be from Bethlehem, the beautiful, holy, historical city. Being Muslim in a predominantly Christian population is refreshing and awakening. At the time, my father's family was one of the few Muslim families in Bethlehem. I remember seeing pictures of the Virgin Mary hanging in my grandparents' home, a very "un-Muslim" thing. I was so touched by the sentiment. I remember asking my dad, "Are your parents Christian?" He smiled and said, "We are from Bethlehem, we celebrate both religions." I think that day and that sentence built in me the love and tolerance of others. I thank my dad and Bethlehem for that, and I strive to build the same in my own children.

Palestine never leaves you. She is tattooed on your skin, mixed with your blood, haunting you forever. Sometimes you want to ignore her and pretend you don't know her. But she is unstoppable. She won't let you leave her.

People ask me, "Are you more Egyptian or Palestinian?" I always say that Egypt is my heart and Palestine is my soul. And in my soul I long for Jerusalem. I dream of her and I paint her and I sing about her. I know her so well, and she knows me well, too.

My Jerusalem, you are everything I want and everything I dread. You are sorrow, you are heartbreak, you are pain. But you are also music, you are dabke, you are dancing, you are prayer. You are PEACE.

It doesn't matter what they call you, it doesn't matter what religion was assigned to you, it doesn't matter where you are located on the map. You are mine and nobody can take you away from me.

Jerusalem, you are a living city with a heart and a soul and an access to the hidden and the unknown. I know it, you told me a million times not to worry about you. And I don't! I trust you, believe in you, and even the most destructive storm cannot change you. You remain.

How can you feel a strong connection to a place that you only saw once when you were merely a seven-year-old child? Jerusalem, you cannot be unseen or unfelt.

Yes, Jerusalem is religiously significant, an architectural museum, a plethora of history. But, for me, she represents more than that. She is the sign, the omen, the proof. She stands there reminding us of the ugliness of the human but also giving us the much-needed hope that there is something bigger, more dominant than all the world powers combined.

She reminds us that we were born to tolerate, to be kind, to love and be loved. She is the Oscar winner of Best Romantic Movie. She stands there hurt, abused, but proud and beautiful, with age giving her more beauty and charm.

She is wise, always giving the other cheek. She takes it all in, watches the cowardly human weaknesses and just smiles

back. She never gives up on us, forever exuding love upon every person regardless of their religion, beliefs, heart, or color.

She gives back to the merciless before the honorable. She knows a secret that nobody else knows. She knows the truth. If only we listened. If only we paid more attention.

She longs to make us understand. "You are all the same. You were all born equal. You are all loved."

She knows that we are all one and we all shall return to The One. She knows we all have the same fears, the same weaknesses, the same heartache.

She is the mother who loves all her children equally. She will never judge us for she knows we are all sinners. But she will hold our hand and guide us.

Sometimes she screams in anguish, "Why are you doing this? You were not created to destroy but rather to build, to build each other." But we don't always listen.

Jerusalem, are you mad at me? I will never forgive myself for leaving you this long. But you must know that I am your captive. My heart never left you. My soul thrives on seeing you. Every single time I look at your photos, my breath is taken away. I have to gasp for air. Your beauty is mesmerizing. My sense of guilt is overbearing.

How I wish I were one of the brave ones. How I wish I could wipe your tears and sweep away the nasty footprints off your pavements.

But instead, it is you who wipes my tears, smiles at me, and tells me all will be ok.

My Jerusalem, you are a blessing and a burden. How I wish I could ignore you; you pierce my soul and break my heart.

You are my father who had to leave his home to find a better life, who had to spend his life living apart from his family. You are my cousins that look like me but I never met, you are my grandparents that never put me on their laps and told me stories.

You are so far away. But you are so close, so close that it sometimes becomes agonizing. You suffocate me with your stories and problems, but also embrace me and caress me with your gentleness. You tease me with your splendor, you laugh at my ignorance of your ancient walls.

Nobody is enough for you. None of us are good enough for you, for you are the city of magnificence.

Will you take me back? Please accept me for I never left you. You are my favorite dream and my worst nightmare. How can a person feel jealousy over a place? I am so jealous over you, I want you to be mine and only mine. But so does everyone else.

Now that I have children of my own, I understand a little bit more. I understand how you are able to forgive. No matter how many times your children hurt you, you will never love them any less.

God, how strong you are! How do you do it? How do you watch all the awfulness of the world yet still radiate all this calmness and peacefulness? What is your message to me? I urge you to speak, give me any information, let me in on your secret. Will there be a happy ending? Does any of it matter?

I long for the forgiveness of the Almighty God, to grant me heaven where you come to me and where we laugh together about the ridiculousness of it all.

Can we at least be together in the afterlife? You will be there, won't you? When it's all revealed. When you are saved. When there is no more hurt.

You will be there telling us that you hoped we would have broken your walls down, burnt your buildings, destroyed you completely. You would rather die than have us fight each other over you. But we never understood.

Now we know, my love, we know that it was all a big test. And we failed miserably. We let you down. Nothing can save us now except the mercy of God.

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Mohamed K. Ghumrawi is a current Ph.D. candidate in International Relations and an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Florida International University (FIU). Mr. Ghumrawi is also the Senior Program Coordinator of the Jaffer Center for Muslim World Studies at FIU. He is also the founding Faculty Director of the "FIU in the Middle East" study abroad program. His research interests include dynamics surrounding the Palestinian-Israeli question, the Palestinian diaspora, Islamic studies, Middle East politics, conflict resolution, peace studies, state formation, foreign policy, and security studies.

Rana Hajjaj is the program manager for Al-Quds Bard College of Arts and Sciences (AQB) at Bard Annandale. AQB is a partnership between Bard College and Al-Quds University in Abu Dis, Jerusalem, and confers US-accredited BA and MAT degrees from both institutions. Rana earned her B.B.A. from the American University of Beirut and her MBA from Marist College. Prior to coming to Bard, she served for five years at the Permanent Observer Mission of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to the United Nations in New York. She also served the IFRC in the Middle East North Africa Regional Office in Lebanon for two years. Rana also managed two development programs in Beirut, assisting Palestinian and Iraqi refugees. She currently serves on the Board of Know Thy Heritage.

Dr. Hisham Khatib is a member of the Jordanian Senate. He was born in Acre, Palestine and spent his youth and early career in Jerusalem, where he was the city's chief electrical engineer. He has lived in Amman, Jordan, since the early 1970s and for many years served as a minister in several Jordanian Cabinets. One of the world's leading energy experts and honorary vice chairman of the World Energy Council, Dr. Khatib published widely on energy matters and the global environment. Alongside his professional activities, Dr. Khatib has collected paintings, lithographs, travel books, maps, atlases, and photographs on Jerusalem, Palestine, and Egypt. His rich and varied collection is one of the largest still in private hands.

Dina Naji was born in Kuwait to a Palestinian father and an Egyptian mother. She is a self-taught artist who realized her passion for painting during a difficult time in her life when she turned to art to release negative energy. Art then moved from merely therapeutic to an overwhelming passion. Palestine is a subject that she often conveys in her paintings and writings and she considers Jerusalem an inspiration to all artists. Dina worked in Human Resources for most of her professional life. She has a bachelor's in Business Administration and a Master of Arts degree in Comparative Education from the American University in Cairo. She currently lives in Cairo with her husband and two children.

Dr. Ilham Nasser is an educator who spent over twenty-five years in the research of child development and teacher education in different formal and non-formal settings in the U.S., Central Africa, and the Middle East. Her Ph.D. is in Human Development and Child Study from the University of Maryland-College Park. She worked for several years as a classroom teacher and a school counselor, and was a Faculty of Teacher Education for 12 years at George Mason University. Her research agenda includes studies and publications on the topic of global teachers' professional development and more specifically, teacher preparation and professional development in social and political contexts and ways these influence children's outcomes. Currently, she is the director of the empirical research in education, part of Advancing Education in Muslim Societies, at the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Washington, DC.

Dr. Ali Qleibo is an artist, author, and anthropologist. Born in Jerusalem and educated in the United States, his books and artwork have taken him all over the world. Dr. Qleibo has lectured at Al-Quds University, teaching ancient classical civilization. He has also held various senior positions locally and internationally, including Director of Cultural Studies Program at Al-Quds University; Fellowship at Shalom Hartman Institute; Director of Department of Fine Arts at Al-Quds University; and Visiting Professor at Tokyo University for Foreign Studies, and at Kyoto University in Japan. At The Jerusalem Research Center, Dr. Qleibo developed the Muslim tourism itinerary in Jerusalem, encompassing tangible and intangible heritage. He is a specialist in Palestinian social history. He has authored various books, including *Surviving the Wall*, *Before the Mountains Disappear*; *Jerusalem in the Heart*; and *Mamluk Architectural Heritage in Jerusalem*, as well as a plethora of articles published locally and internationally. His pioneering ethnographic field work published over the past ten years indicates the continuity between contemporary Palestinian customs and manners and ancient Semitic cultures.

Lana Shehadeh is a doctoral candidate at Florida International University's Department of Politics and International Relations. Her research concentrates on the resurgence of religion within world politics. She concentrates on the Political Economy of Religion and its use as a form of legitimacy for authority in the Middle East. She currently resides in the Middle East and is a pre-doctoral fellow with Columbia University's Global Center in Amman, Jordan.

Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation
مؤسسة الأراضي المقدسة المسيحية المسكونية

HCEF MISSION STATEMENT, CORE VALUES, AND GOALS

Mission Statement

HCEF is committed to the continued presence, empowerment and well-being of Arab Christians in the Holy Land and to developing the bonds of solidarity between them and Christians worldwide.

Core Values

Our mission and core values underpin everything we do. Whether we are designing programs, putting together a conference or disseminating news from the Holy Land or from parishes around the U.S. and elsewhere, we look at whether we embody these values. These core tenets give our programs the roots they need to sustain the work when challenges arise. HCEF is:

- Ecumenical

From the very beginning, HCEF has been an ecumenical organization. There are multiple Christian denominations in the Holy Land, and our programs aim at supporting all of them. We encourage Palestinian Christians to be ecumenical in their outreach to Christians around the world, and we encourage

HCEF's supporters to be ecumenical in their prayers and support. Because Christians in the Holy Land comprise less than 2 percent of the population, it is important that they build their support for one another on the Christian faith they share.

- Based on Christian Faith

It is a core belief of Christians that we are one mystical Body in Christ. We want all of our work to reflect that unity and to demonstrate that if any part of the body suffers, we all suffer. By the same belief, we also demonstrate that when one part of the body rejoices, we all rejoice.

- Dedicated to Peace and Justice

We firmly believe that a just peace in the Holy Land is the only long-term solution to the difficult living conditions that have led many Christians to emigrate. We encourage the work of those who help bridge the distance between the political factions that exacerbate the situation in the Holy Land.

- Service-Oriented

Each person at HCEF seeks to be a servant leader following the example of Jesus Christ. We serve both the Christians in the Holy Land and our amazingly generous supporters around the world. We want each person who interacts with us to feel that we have given them our full attention, and we want each of our programs to reflect the importance of interpersonal connections.

- Transparent

We want our work to be transparent. We want people to understand how we build relationships between Holy Land Christians and how each of our programs operates. We want HCEF supporters to connect in personal ways with the Christians whom they support in the Holy Land.

Goals

HCEF lives its mission and core values by witnessing the teaching of our Savior Jesus Christ.

- We educate people around the world about the presence of Arab Christians in the Holy Land and remind them of their moral, practical and spiritual obligation to the Mother Church.
- We build community between Christians throughout the world and Arab Christians of the Holy Land through communication, publications, pilgrimages and other joint endeavors.
- We develop bonds of solidarity through church-to-church, family-to-family and person-to-person partnership programs in order to bring Christians together in community for future
- We promote peace, justice, interfaith dialogue and reconciliation in the Holy Land by removing the causes of suffering and replacing despair with hope, fear with human security and humiliation with dignity.

- We undertake specific projects designed to empower Arab Christians and advance better living conditions in the Holy Land. Projects focus on creating economic opportunities, advancing education, building and renovating houses and developing the healthy growth of children.

"Let us work together to replace despair with HOPE, fear with HUMAN SECURITY, and humiliation with DIGNITY"

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The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies

The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) was established in 1994 in Amman, Jordan, under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal. RIIFS is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that provides a venue for the interdisciplinary study of intercultural and interreligious issues with the aim of defusing tensions and promoting peace, regionally and globally.

We live in a troubled world that is in need of deeper mutual understanding between diverse religions and cultures. RIIFS focuses on promoting common human and ethical values that contribute to strengthening cooperation and interfaith relations, eliminating mutual misconceptions about the 'other' and ultimately expanding these shared commonalities in the hope of promoting peaceful coexistence.

RIIFS Vision

- To build sustained, engaged communities and regional and international partnerships among specialists including professionals and religious leaders.
- To foster socially resilient and anti-radicalized environments.

RIIFS Mission

- To foster interreligious and intercultural dialogue as an effective tool for countering intolerance, extremism and radicalism and for forging a culture of mutual respect and understanding.
- To encourage regional networking on religious and cultural issues through effective communications and interaction within academic and religious environments.

Achieving RIIFS Mission

The following activities lead to achieving our principal mission of fostering dialogue and developing a well-informed network of influence in the region:

- Organizing foundational seminars, primarily in Jordan.
- Establishing partnerships with institutes and religious organizations such as Al-Azhar Al-Sharif (Egypt), Adyan Foundation (Lebanon), Mohammadia Association of scholars (Morocco), Danmission of Denmark, the ministry of Awqaf and religious Affairs (Bahrain), and The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (Vatican). Also, RIIFS heads the Jordanian Network of Anna Lindh Foundation.
- Reaching a larger audience of thinkers and academics and adding depth via a strong programme of local, regional and international engagement activities.
- Sustaining interest and promoting growth through outreach activities to different communities including:

- Youth
- Islamic clergy and faith leaders (Imams, preachers, and women preachers)
- School communities (teachers and pupils)
- University communities (students and lecturers)
- Wider grassroots communities (members and leaders)
- Academics
- Writers and Journalists

The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies

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